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NOV. 24, 2008

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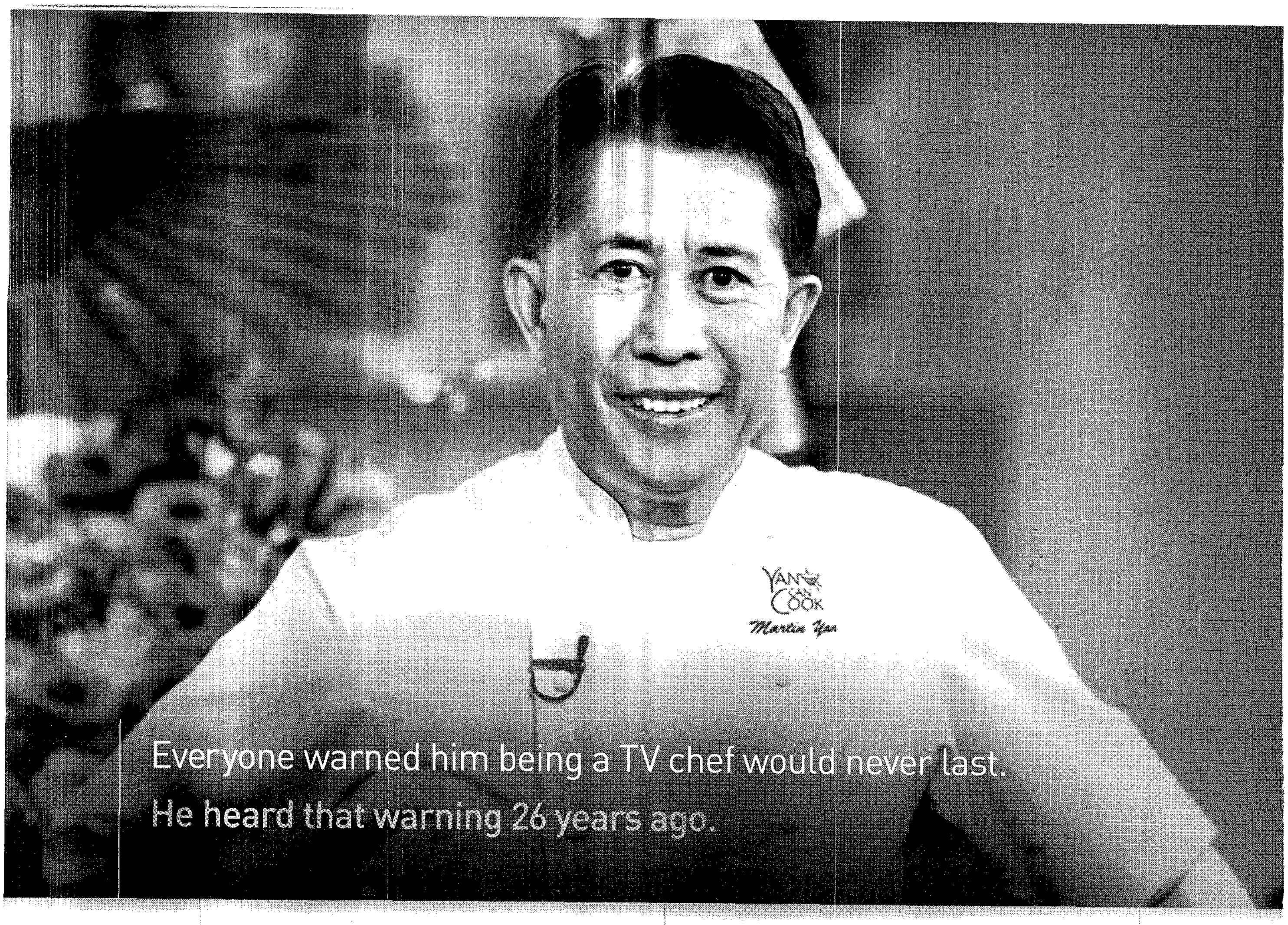
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Early on, he met Merrill Lynch Financial Advisor John Ting. "Martin said the life of a celebrity chef is short," says Ting, "so we have to make sure the money is there when he's older." That was over 2,700 shows ago.

"John understands my needs," says Yan. "Now his 15-year-old twins are facing college," says Ting. "And we're ready."

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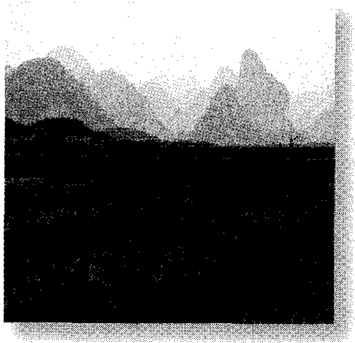

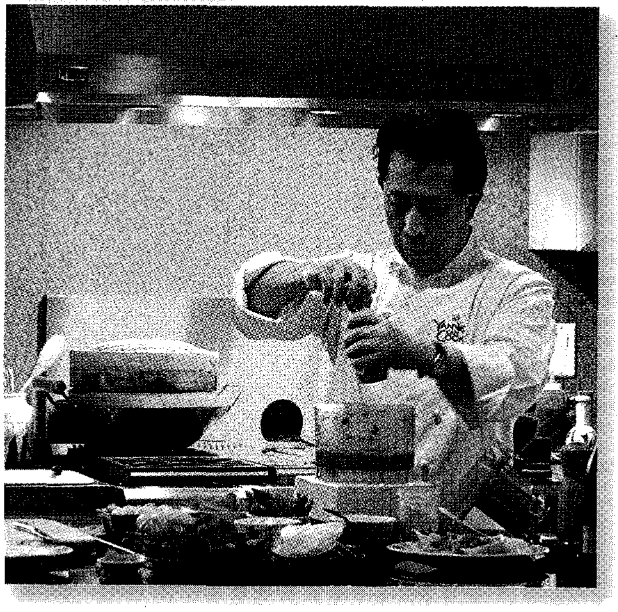

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John Ting
Merrill Lynch Financial Advisor

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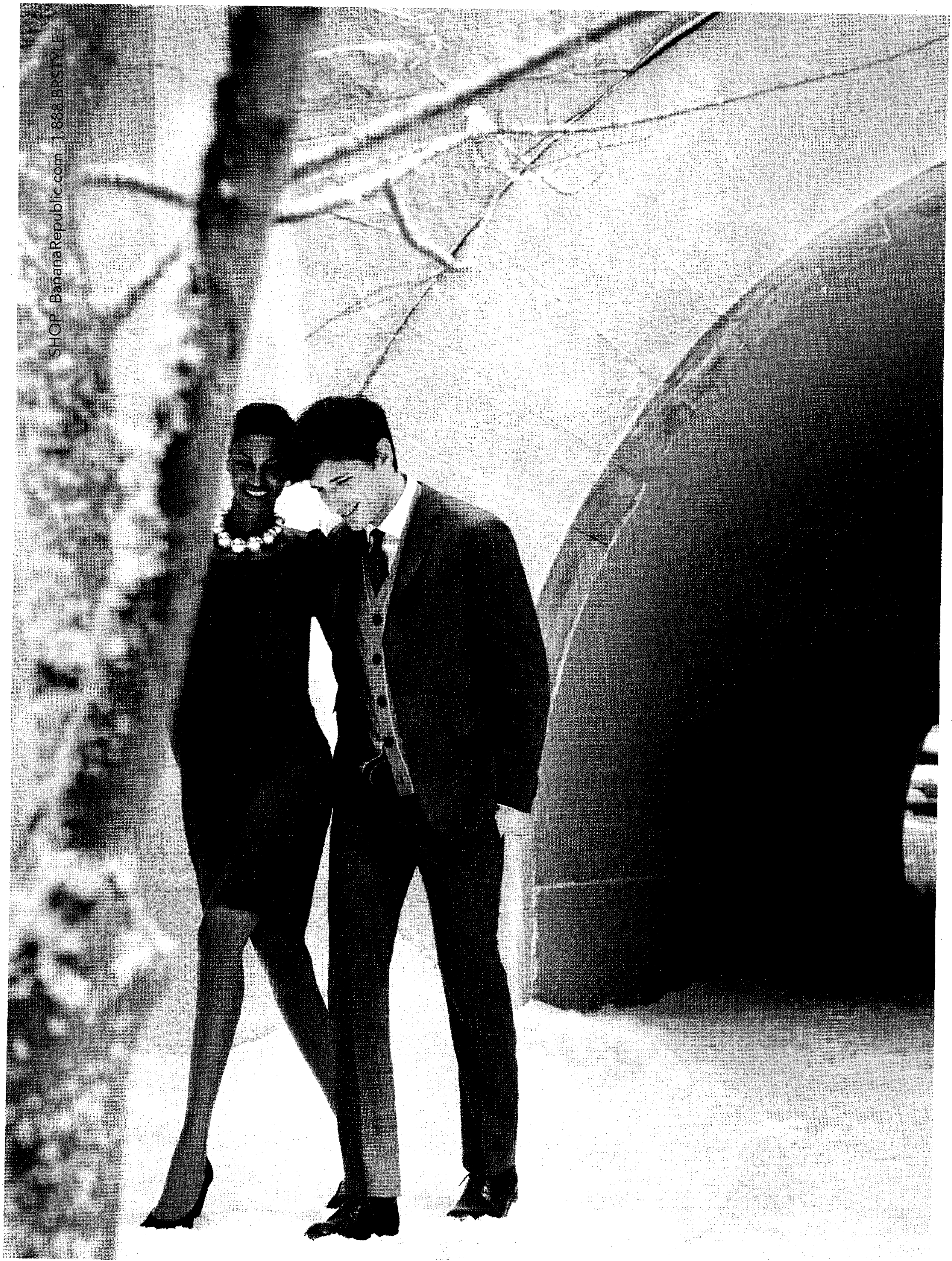
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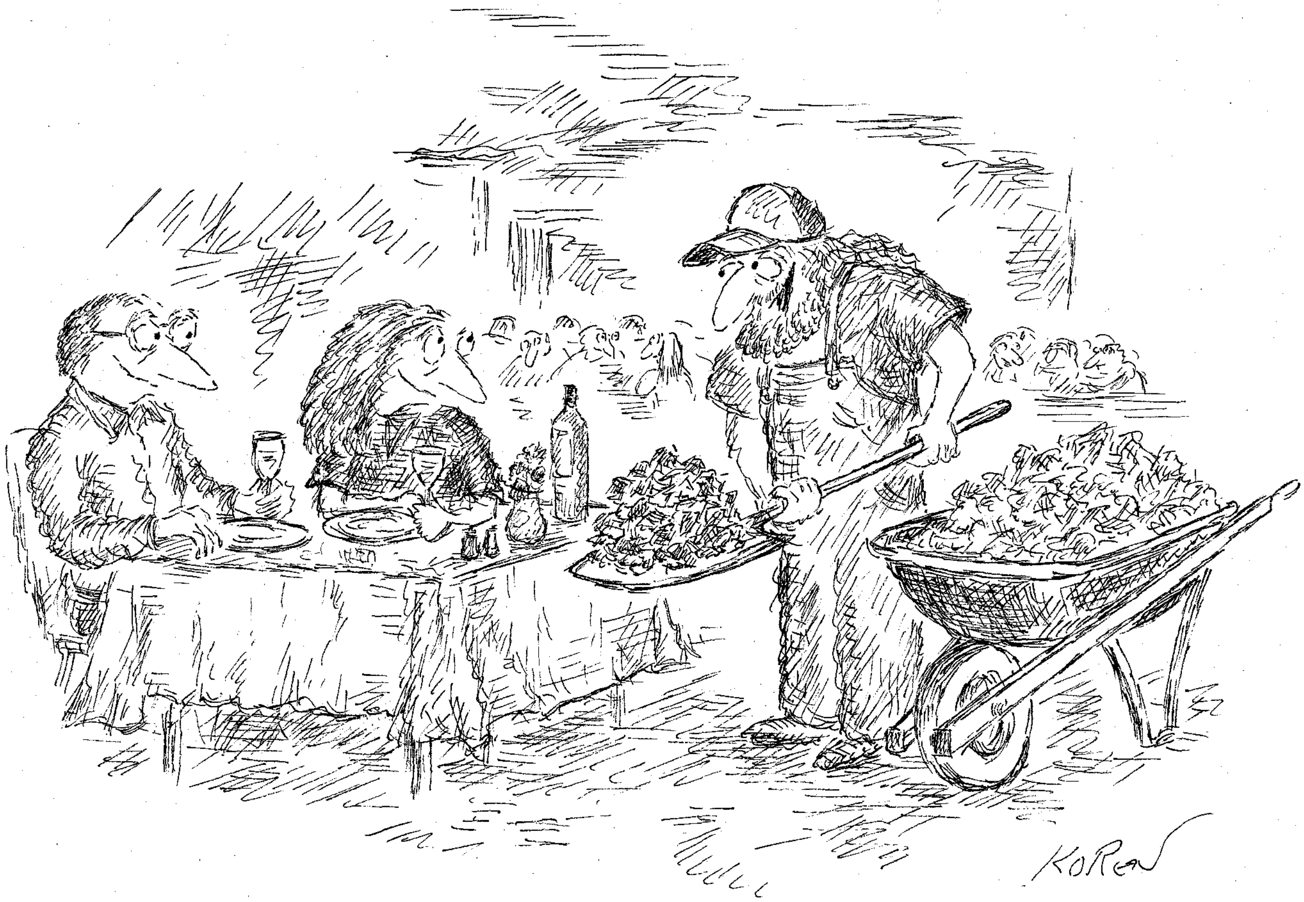
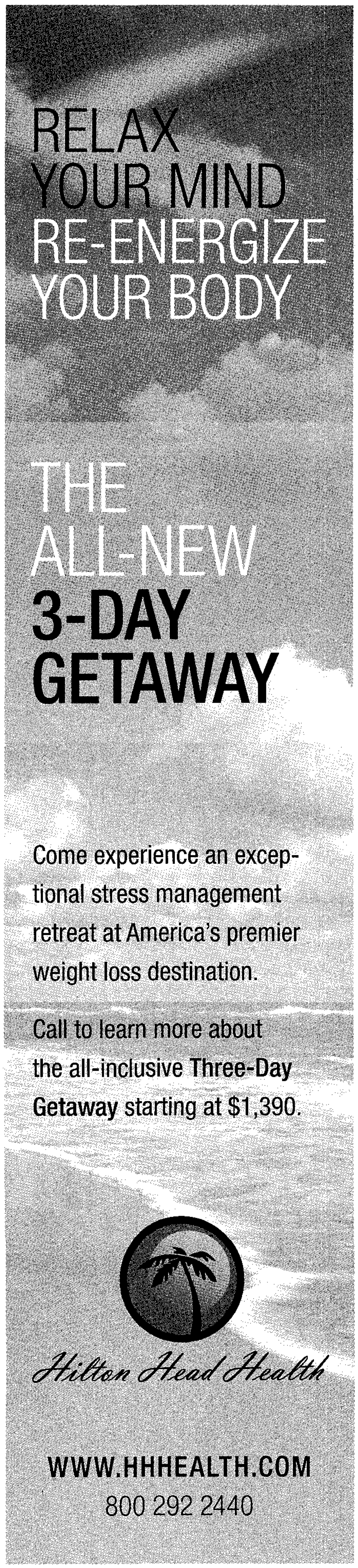


"Here's some baby spinach—from my soil to your plate."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CONTRIBUTORS

Peter J. Boyer ("Eviction," p. 48) is a staff writer.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Comment, p. 39) writes regularly about the environment. Her book "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change" is out in paperback.

Daniel Menaker (The Talk of the Town, p. 44), the author of "The Treatment," is working on a book about conversation, entitled "Can We Talk?"

Fuchsia Dunlop ("Garden of Contentment," p. 54) has written three books about Chinese food, including "Shark's Fin and Sichuan Pepper: A Sweet-Sour Memoir of Eating in China," which came out in April.

Jack Handey (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 62) is the author of "What I'd Say to the Martians: And Other Veiled Threats."

Calvin Trillin ("By Meat Alone," p. 64) has a new book, "Deciding the Next Decider: The 2008 Presidential Race in Rhyme," which will be published next month.

Todd Oppenheimer ("Sharper," p. 70) is the author of "The Flickering Mind: Saving Education from the False Promise of Technology."

Mimi Sheraton ("One Fish, Two Fish," p. 82) has been a food critic and reporter for more than fifty years. "Eating My Words: An Appetite for Life," a memoir, is her most recent book.

Burkhard Bilger ("A Better Brew," p. 86), a staff writer, is the author of "Noodling for Flatheads."

Rita Dove (Poem, p. 90) received a Pulitzer Prize for her collection of poems "Thomas and Beulah." She was the U.S. Poet Laureate from 1993 to 1995. A new collection of poems, "Sonata Mulattica," is due out in the spring.

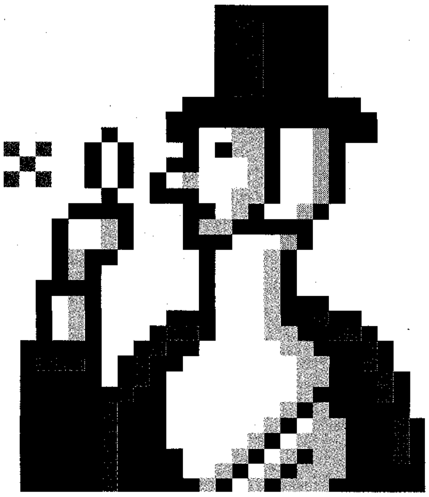
Chris Ware (Comic Strip, p. 93) is a cartoonist and graphic novelist. The nineteenth issue of his periodical *ACME Novelty Library* has just been published.

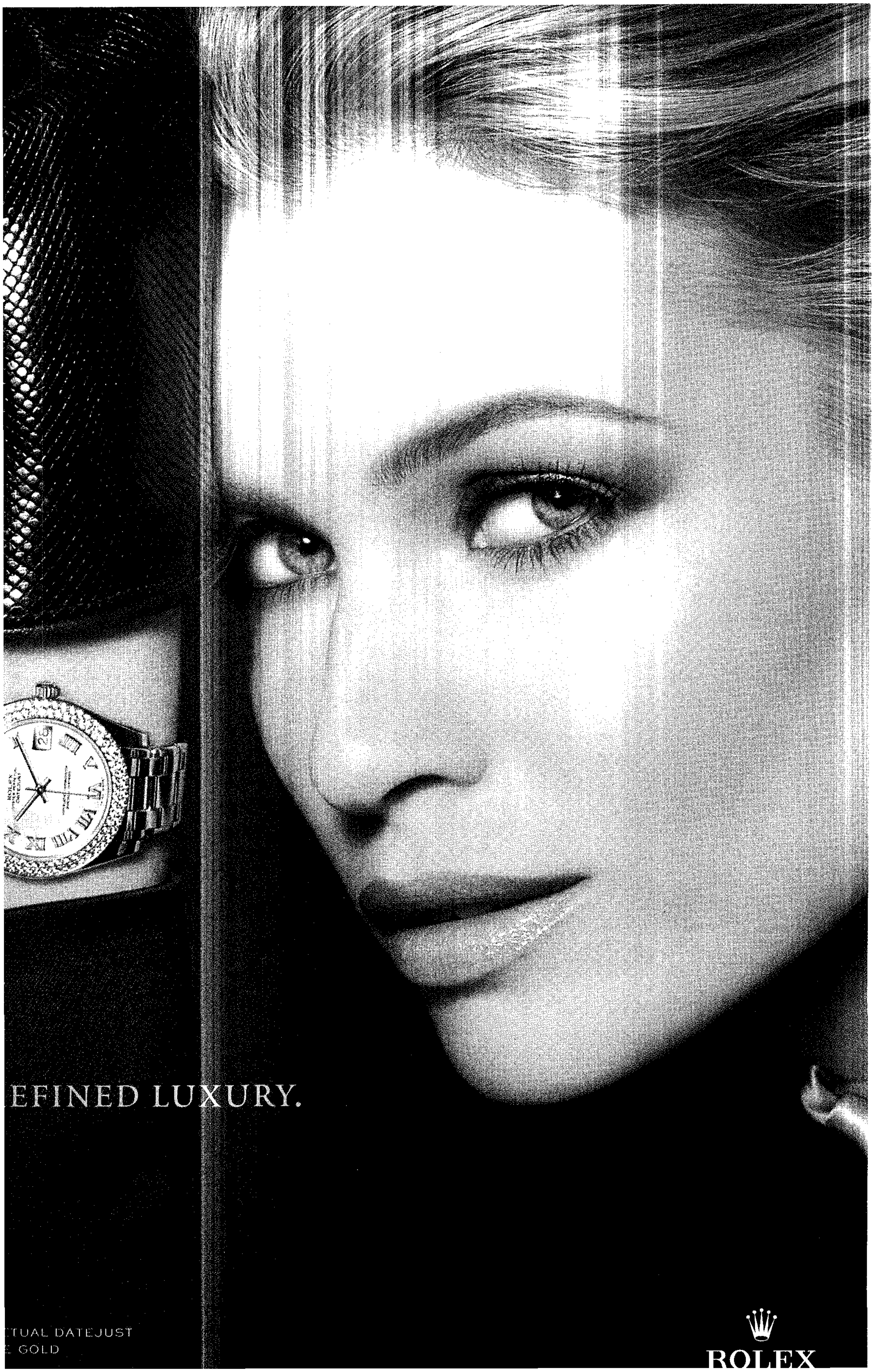
Jane Kramer ("The Hungry Travellers," p. 100) writes the Letter from Europe for the magazine.

Edwidge Danticat (Fiction, p. 108) won the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for her autobiography "Brother, I'm Dying."

Wayne Thiebaud (Cover) is Professor Emeritus of Art at the University of California, Davis.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Ask the Author: *Calvin Trillin* takes readers' questions about food. / Audio slide show: Photojournalists and their memorable on-the-job meals. / Audio: *Burkhard Bilger* tastes extreme beers. / *A. M. Homes* reads Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." / Blogs: *James Surowiecki* and *Steve Coll* on the economy, *Hendrik Hertzberg* and *George Packer* on politics, *Sasha Frere-Jones* on pop music, plus the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and Goings On. / The digital edition: the latest issue in your inbox on Mondays. / A complete archive of every issue, back to 1925. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.

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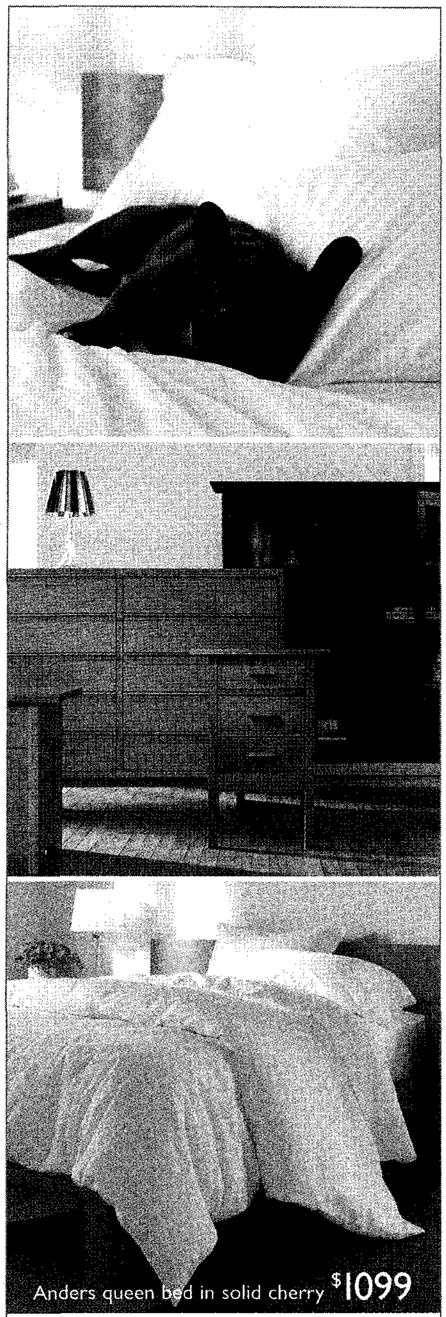

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CREATIVE GAMING

As a video-game journalist, I was disappointed that Tom Bissell chose to profile Cliff Bleszinski, a developer whose product represents the video-game industry of a decade ago ("The Grammar of Fun," November 3rd). The games Bleszinski makes are essentially the same as those developed by the creators of Doom in the early nineties, and the gaudy aesthetic is hardly artistic. Gears of War is a polished game, but it also stands out as being largely derivative and banal in an industry currently brimming with creativity—like those developers at companies such as Rockstar North, Valve, and Blizzard Entertainment who are driving the industry forward.

Tom Endo
New York City

THE DARKER SIDE

Alexander Stille, in his piece on the administration of Silvio Berlusconi, offers American readers minor comic relief from our own politicians, but it is important to note that Berlusconi has inflicted, since his return to power this past spring, real pain and suffering on Italy's more than four million immigrants, both legal and undocumented ("Girls! Girls! Girls!," November 3rd). Dozens of new detention centers for immigrants have been opened, the allowable time period for detention extended from two months to eighteen (in line with a similar regulation passed by the European Union), and prison sentences for illegal immigrants who commit crimes will henceforth be longer, by about a third, than for native Italians. In the new Berlusconi-Maroni atmosphere of xenophobia, Gypsy encampments have been attacked by angry mobs, the inhabitants—mostly women and children—forced to flee, and the camps firebombed. Immigrant shopkeepers have been assaulted, and an African from Burkina Faso was beaten and murdered just a few weeks ago, for allegedly stealing a packet of cookies. Berlusconi has given permission to all that is ugliest in Italian society to come to the surface.

Suzanne Ruta
New York City

WHOSE BENEFIT?

Steve Coll gives too much credit to George W. Bush for having "expanded Medicare" (The Talk of the Town, November 10th). The Medicare Part D prescription-drug plan was enacted after clear demand from the elderly to improve access to drugs. Although it does alleviate some drug costs, it is badly constructed (with its "donut hole"), and encourages large pharmaceutical profits rather than intelligent drug selection, while limiting the kind of bargaining for reasonable prices undertaken by the health system for veterans. Furthermore, the *Wall Street Journal* noted this week that, for the ten largest Medicare drug plans, premium rises in 2009 will average thirty-one per cent, with some increases as high as sixty per cent—perhaps more evidence that Bush and the Republicans would prefer destroying Medicare to expanding it.

Lonnie B. Hanauer
Millburn, N.J.

BEST OF BREED

Steve Brodner depicts Vice-President-elect Joe Biden as an Airedale (Sketchbook, November 3rd). Yet Airedales are aloof and would likely ignore an extended hand, while Biden is gregarious and would just as soon shake one. Also, Airedales have autumnal colors, while our next Vice-President is snowy and pink. I agree that he has terrier blood, so let's call him a Soft-Coated Wheaten.

Mark Charenton
Scarsdale, N.Y.

●

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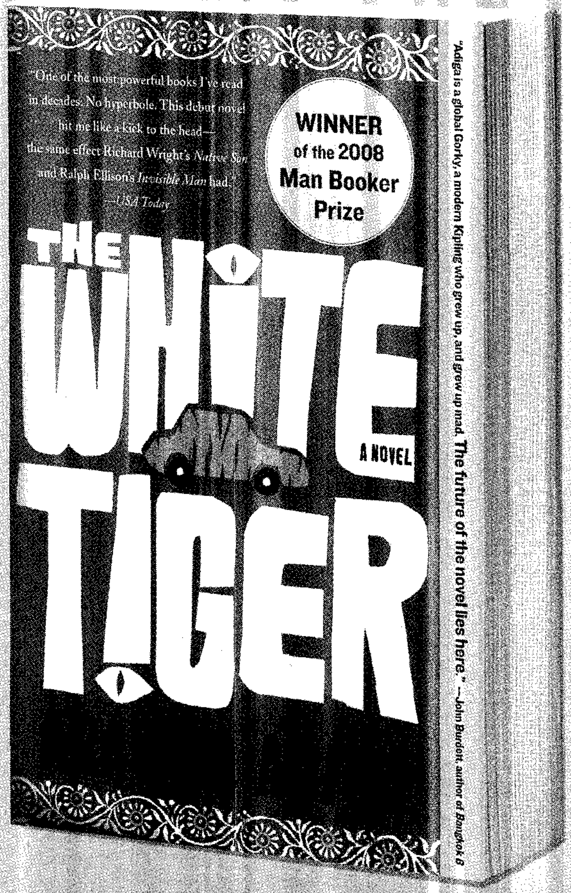
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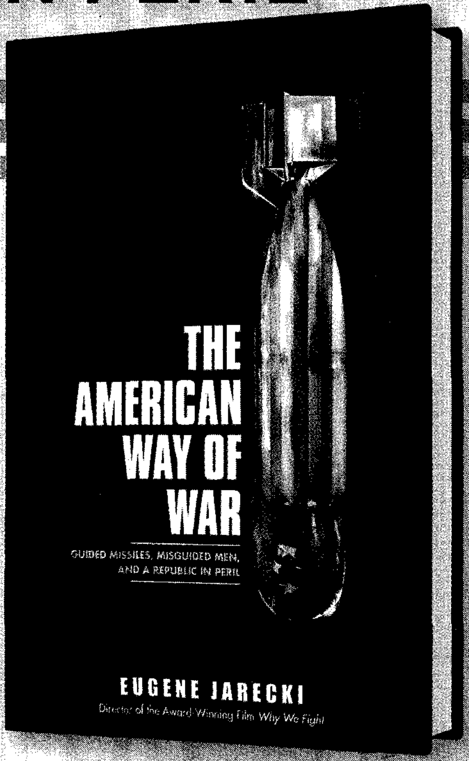
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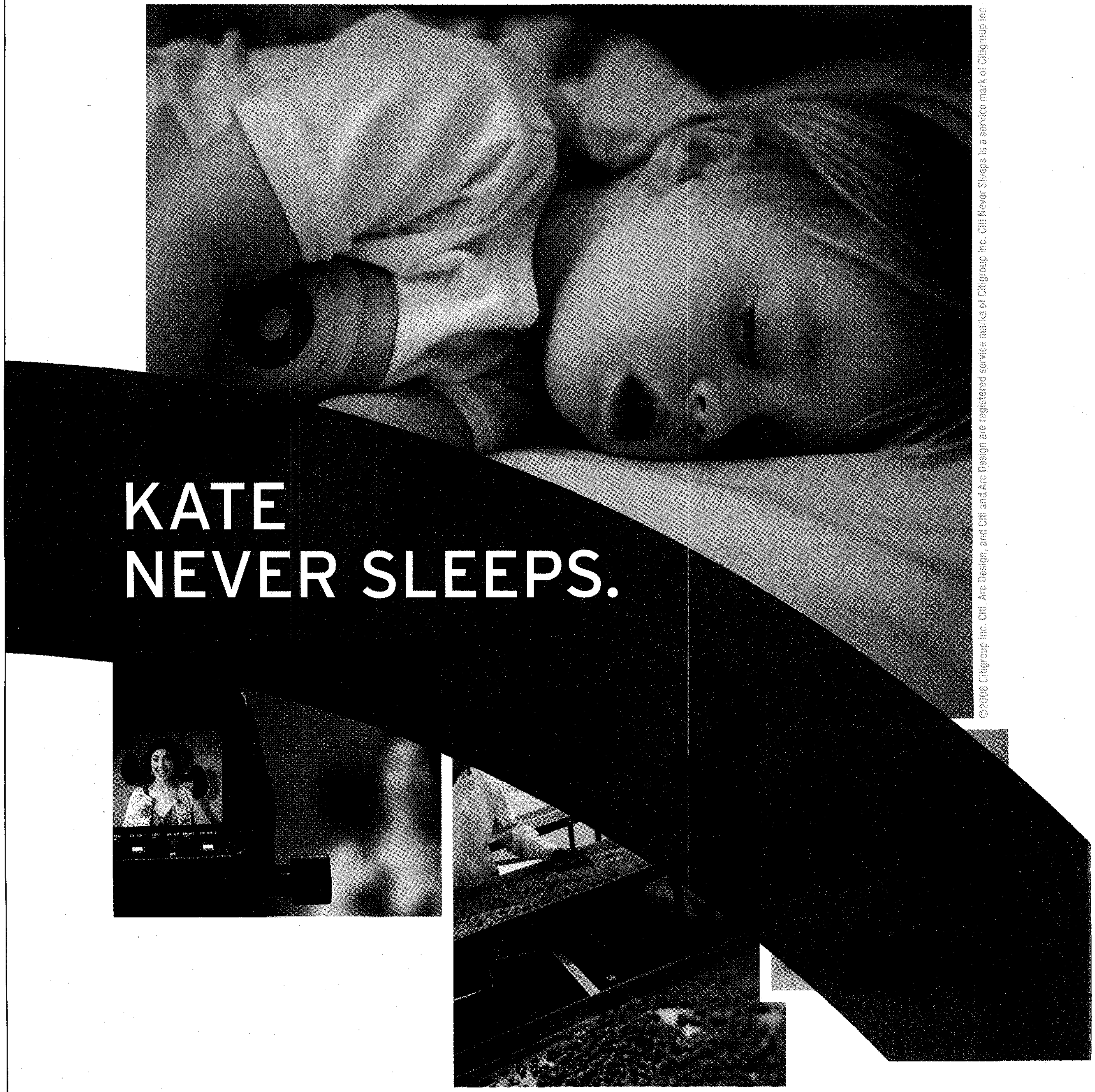
KATE
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Dreams. **Realities.**

After an evening of tantrums that shook the walls, Kate has finally begun to dream. But down the hall, her father wonders how he'll afford to send her to college, while her mother considers a larger home. Downtown, Kate's overworked pediatrician ponders an early retirement. In Bentonville, a shipment of Kate's favorite peas arrives at the baby food bottling plant. And in Sydney, a sing-along DVD is being filmed, one that'll provide Kate's grateful parents with a brand-new lullaby.

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"La Damnation de Faust," at the Metropolitan Opera. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
23	24	25	19	20	21	22

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
SHER THING

Craig Lucas wrote "A Prelude to a Kiss" and the book for the musical "The Light in the Piazza," and he has also adapted his work for the silver screen ("The Dying Gaul"). Now, Playwrights Horizons presents his new drama, "Prayer for My Enemy," directed by Bartlett Sher, the Tony-winning director of "South Pacific" and "The Light in the Piazza," who was recently named the resident director of the Lincoln Center Theatre. (See page 18.)

NIGHT LIFE
GUITAR HERO

Though he's not as famous as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, or Keith Richards, the guitarist Hubert Sumlin inspired these and countless other players. Sumlin helped propel Howlin' Wolf's band for decades, and he celebrates his seventy-seventh birthday at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill. (See page 22.)

ART
IT LIST

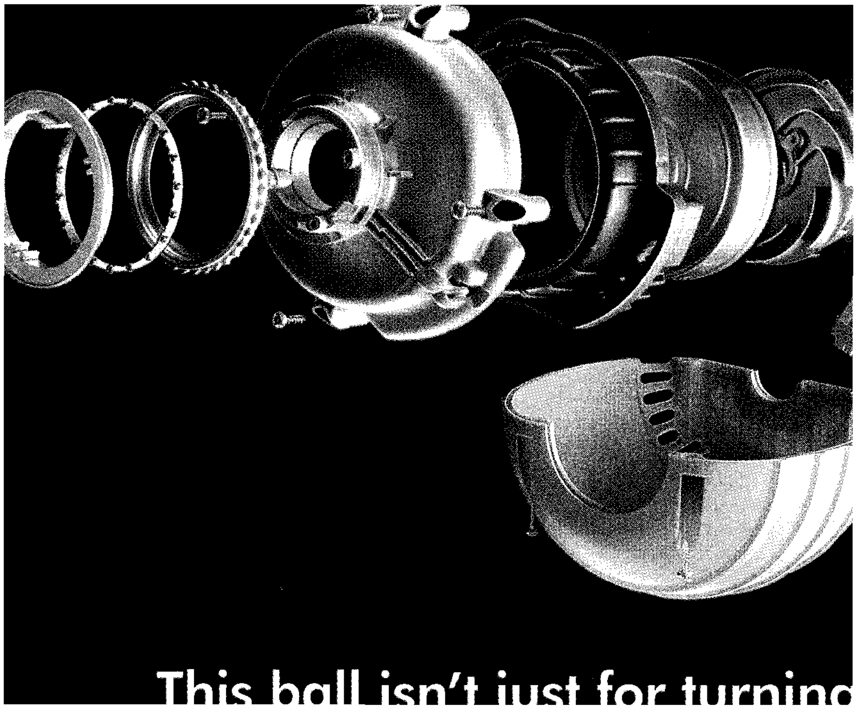
Serena Williams, Colin Powell, and Toni Morrison are among the prominent African-Americans interviewed by Elvis Mitchell for the documentary "The Black List Project," which was directed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders. The Brooklyn Museum exhibits twenty-five large-scale portraits by Greenfield-Sanders, accompanied by excerpts of the film. (See page 24.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
DARKNESS VISIBLE

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center embarks on its long-awaited "Night Fantasies" festival, a heady mix of music by Chopin, Debussy, Ligeti, and others. (See page 28.)

MOVIES
HEY, LADY!

The French got it right—Jerry Lewis is an artistic genius—and Moving Image got just the right man, Peter Bogdanovich, to pose questions to the eighty-two-year-old actor and director, in a rare public discussion at the Times Center. The event will also have clips from films featuring Lewis on both sides of the camera, as well as from his television appearances with Dean Martin. (See page 34.)


This ball isn’t just for turning

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HIP-HOP PRESIDENT

After Barack Obama conceded defeat at the New Hampshire primary last January, the Black Eyed Peas' Will.i.am selected quotes from his concession speech and set them to music—sort of. The video for Will.i.am's "Yes We Can" features a clutch of celebrities singing (or speaking), over Obama and a few shambly acoustic guitar chords. Though the video has been viewed on YouTube more than thirteen million times, there were many more energetic and specific political songs recorded this year, most of them hip-hop. Bossman recorded an uncharitable track about John McCain, Ludacris got in trouble for calling Bush "mentally handicapped," and Tyga recorded a song called "1st Timers for Obama." Obama has generally been a supporter of hip-hop, though he did tell MTV in November that "brothers should pull up their pants." As this seems reasonable, I am hoping for a nonpartisan first hundred days: Obama will recruit some sharp m.c.s with pants that fit and leave Will.i.am in the holographic plane.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

HOLIDAY EVENTS

"RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR"
Nothing says pizzazz like this populist crowd-pleaser, featuring the leggy Rockettes showing off their lithe physiques and precisely choreographed high kicks, an army of dancing Santas, and the multimedia extravaganza of "New York at Christmas." As it has since its very first year, back in 1933, the show closes with the ecstatic "Living Nativity," a dramatic retelling of the birth of Christ. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-307-1000. Through Dec. 30.)

"THE NUTCRACKER"
Balanchine's 1954 version of the Christmas fantasy, performed by the New York City Ballet, is still the gold standard, featuring scores of children from the School of American Ballet, an exciting battle to the death between the toy soldiers and the seven-headed Mouse King, and a memorable "Waltz of the Snowflakes." (David H. Koch Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Nov. 28-Jan. 3.) ♦ For revisionists, Dances Patrelle's "The Yorkville Nutcracker" is set in turn-of-the-century New York, beginning at a party at Gracie Mansion and ending up at the Crystal Palace of the Bronx Botanical Gardens. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier are danced by the lovely Jenifer Ringer and the very capable Jared Angle, both of New York City Ballet. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-7933. Dec. 11-14.) ♦ Tired parents may opt for the lively New York Theatre Ballet production, only an hour long, with inspired sets modelled after the nineteenth-century English toy theatres. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. Dec. 12-21.) ♦ The Joffrey Ballet School offers its annual "Nutcracker," performed by students; under its new director, George de la Peña, each section will be choreographed by one of the school's teachers. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. Dec. 12-14.) ♦ The Valentina Kozlova Dance Conservatory's version features a female Drosselmeier (played by Kozlova) and a very impressive young dancer in the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy: the sixteen-year-old Whitney Jensen, who recently won a top honor at the international Varna Competition in Bulgaria. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 13 at 4 and 8.)

TREES
More than five hundred folded-paper animals will adorn the American Museum of Natural History's thirteen-foot origami tree this year, on display in the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall, representing inhabitants of the museum's dioramas, permanent halls, and special exhibitions. Through Jan. 4. (Central Park W. at 79th St. 212-769-5100.) ♦ The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Christmas tree, located in the Medieval Sculpture Hall starting Nov. 25, is a brilliantly lit conifer laden with flying silk-robed angels and cherubim who hover above the Neapolitan Baroque crèche at its base. Tree-lighting ceremonies are held Tuesday through Sunday at 4:30, with additional lightings Fridays and Saturdays at 5:30 and 6:30. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-535-7710. Through Jan. 6.) ♦ Rockefeller Center's illustrious behemoth is illuminated for the seventy-sixth time on Dec. 3. It will be set aglow near the end of a star-studded ceremony that runs from 7 to 9. (Fifth Ave. at 50th St. Through Jan. 7.)

HANUKKAH
The Festival of Lights begins this year on Dec. 21. That afternoon, at 5:30, the first lamp will be lit atop the thirty-two-foot-tall menorah on Fifth Ave. at 59th St. There will also be live music, dancing, and hot latkes. A light will be added each night at the same time through Dec. 28, except for Friday and Saturday, when the lighting takes place at 3:45 and 8:30, respectively. (For more information, call 718-778-6000.) ♦ Dec. 21-28: The prolific indie rockers Yo La Tengo, led by front man Ira Kaplan, play all eight nights in their hometown of Hoboken, New Jersey, at Maxwell's, continuing a tradition held (almost) every year since 2001. A different unannounced and unusual act precedes them nightly. (1039 Washington St. 201-653-1703.) ♦ Dec. 21-30: The Hasidic performer Matisyahu follows suit, with his third annual eight-nights-of-reggae Hanukkah, beginning at Webster Hall. (Dec. 21-25. 125 E. 11th St.) Skipping Friday night because of the Sabbath, Matisyahu resumes the series at the Music Hall of Williamsburg for four more nights (thus making the miracle of light last a whole extra day). Special guests include Little Jackie, Brett Dennen, and Assembly of Dust. (Dec. 27-30. 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn.)

"HOLIDAY TRAIN SHOW"
The New York Botanical Garden's annual tribute to the romance of the season and the rails features model engines and cars chugging their way around the conservatory's replicas of more than a hundred and forty New York City landmarks, all constructed from twigs, berries, leaves, seeds, and the like. Miniatures of the American Museum of Natural History's Rose Center for Earth and Space and Central Park's Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre are new this year, joining Ellis Island, the George Washington Bridge, and Yankee Stadium. (Nov. 23-Jan. 11. Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx. 718-817-8700.)

"WINTUK"
The story for this Cirque du Soleil production involves a boy searching for snow. A trampoline serves as a springboard for aerialists and acrobats, who intermingle with talking lampposts and enormous puppets of dogs, birds, and ice giants. (WaMu Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 212-307-1000. Through Jan. 4.)

"FOR THE TIME BEING: A CHRISTMAS ORATORIO"
Michael Cumpsty directs and performs a reading of W. H. Auden's poem from 1942. Maria Tucci narrates. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 8.)

"TAPPY HOLIDAYS"
This three-year-old tradition features holiday songs performed by a jazz trio and whiz-kid tap dancers. Performers include several youth ensembles, along with pros like Ayodele Casel and Jason Samuels Smith. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 12.)

"PETER AND THE WOLF"
Prokofiev's marvellous children's tale "Peter and the Wolf," now in its second year at "Works & Process" at the Guggenheim, is both a cautionary tale and a witty introduction to the instruments of the orchestra, courtesy of the Juilliard Ensemble. Everyone has a favorite narrator from the past (Alec Guinness, Leonard Bernstein, Sting), but here the wry Isaac Mizrahi presides. (89th St. and Fifth Ave. 212-423-3587. Dec. 13-16 and Dec. 20-21.)

WINTER SOLSTICE
Paul Winter brings his Consort back to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The show returns to the newly renovated nave of the Cathedral, which boasts a fully restored Aeolian-Skinner Pipe Organ, to be played for the first time since the 2001 fire damaged it. Special guests include the Brazilian singer and guitarist Renato Braz, the gospel singer Theresa Thomason, and the woodwind master Paul McCandless. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 866-811-4111. Dec. 18-20.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC—CLASSICAL

"MESSIAH"
The St. Thomas Choir, which plies its noble trade in the luxuriant Gothic splendor of its eponymous church on Fifth Avenue, has always set a certain local standard in singing Handel's generous "entertainment" on Christian themes: no other American choir has such a strong connection to the finest traditions of Anglican music-making. The group's musicianship and style remain impressive under the tutelage of John Scott, who leads it in two performances accompanied by the Baroque group Concert Royal; the soloists include the renowned tenor Rufus Müller. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. Dec. 9 and Dec. 11 at 7:30. For tickets, visit www.saintthomaschurch.org.) ♦ Kent Tritle, the longtime director of the "Sacred Music in a Sacred Space" series at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, is the big man in the "Messiah" business this year. He leads the excellent avocational singers of the Oratorio Soci-

TARA HARDY

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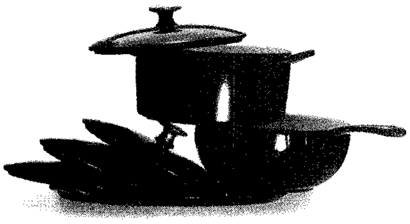


Crate&Barrel

ety (with the mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke and the tenor William Ferguson among the vocal soloists) in a performance at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. Dec. 15 at 8.) ♦ Tritle also conducts "Messiah" as the music director of the superb professional group Musica Sacra, where he succeeded the late Richard Westenburg. Westenburg's Sacra style offered a modern, symphonic rendering of the work that nonetheless had a light and smooth Baroque feel; Tritle steps into some very big shoes. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 22-23 at 8.)

The Tuvan throat singers Huun-Huur-Tu pay a visit to (Le) Poisson Rouge.

PABLO LOBATO

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The orchestra, for several years, has offered a worthy "Messiah" of its own. This season it will be led by the Dutch Baroque-music legend Ton Koopman, making his Philharmonic début. The singers Sumnae Im, Andreas Scholl, Jörg Dürmüller, and Detlef Roth are out front, assisted by the powerful Westminster Symphonic Choir. (Dec. 17-18 at 7:30 and Dec. 19-20 at 8.) ♦ The Phil's impressive brass section—teaming up with the gentlemen of the Canadian Brass—begins the holiday season with an afternoon of festive music. (Dec. 14 at 3.) ♦ The mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, singing music by Bizet, Lehár, and Richard Strauss, will be the special guest of the orchestra's New Year's Eve gala, conducted by Lorin Maazel. (Dec. 31 at 7:30.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

CARNEGIE HALL
Deborah Voigt is the latest star singer to take over Carnegie for its holiday celebration, an evening in which she will offer arias, songs, and show tunes by Handel, Schubert, Jerry Herman, and Jule Styne; Patrick Summers conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's. (Dec. 16 at 8.) ♦ The Christmas Eve concert by the New York String Orchestra, a longtime annual convocation of young virtuosos led by Jaime Laredo, is all Mozart: the "Marriage of Figaro" Overture, the Violin Concerto No. 5 ("Turkish," with the appealing young violinist Augustin Hadelich), and the Symphony No. 40 in G Minor (a touch grim for such a night). (Dec. 24 at 7.) ♦ The final concert offers a contemporary work (by John Harbison), Mozart's Concerto for Three Pianos (featuring the esteemed Joseph Kalichstein and two exceptional young colleagues, Shai Wosner and Alon Goldstein), and Mendelssohn's "Scotch" Symphony. (Dec. 28 at 2.) (212-247-7800.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
To hear a Christmas concert in the majestic intimacy of the museum's Medieval Sculpture Hall is an essential New York experience. Chanticleer, the ebullient (and stunningly expert) San Francisco men's chamber choir, has been drawing eager crowds for several years by offering a tempting mix of carols, spirituals, and sacred polyphony from the medieval and Renaissance periods. (Dec. 3-4 and Dec. 7 at 6:30 and 8:30.) ♦ The Gotham-based gentlemen of Lionheart, another admired male chorus, take over from their West Coast colleagues to offer "Christmas in Medieval Italy: Il Laudario di Cortona," just before Christmas Eve. (Dec. 23 at 6:30 and 8:30.) (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949.)

THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS
For some reason, Bach's chamber concertos, the bedrock of the orchestral repertoire, have become Christmastime favorites. Some of the most alluring performances can be found at the annual concerts given by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, which offers them this year at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Theatre. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-875-5788. Dec. 14 at 5 and Dec. 16 at 7:30.) ♦ Bargemusic, the doughty chamber-music series on Brooklyn's Fulton Ferry Landing, is a cozy winter nook that offers spectacular views of New York Harbor and wine and cheese at intermission. The violinist Mark Peskanov, the barge's artistic director, leads a band of New York's finest young musicians in Bach's masterworks on New Year's Eve. (Dec. 31 at 7:30.) (718-624-2083.) ♦ Upper West Siders who want to stay close to home can bring the kids to Symphony Space's "All-Star" Brandenburgs, featuring such estimable musicians as the flutists Eugenia Zukerman and Tara Helen O'Connor and the harpsichordist Bradley Brookshire. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 19 at 8.)

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BLACK MONK
Kevin Newbury directs a chamber musical by Wendy Kesselman, based on the Chekhov story about an artist from a small village who must negotiate the challenges of his rising success. Previews begin Nov. 25. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

CATCH-22
Aquila Theatre presents the world première of Peter Meineck's adaptation of the Joseph Heller novel. Meineck also directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 23. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

CONTINUOUS CITY
The Builders Association presents this play by Harry Sinclair, about the effect of the Internet and globalization on personal relationships. Marianne Weems directs. Nov. 18-22. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

DIVIDING THE ESTATE
Horton Foote's comedy about a Texas family moves to Broadway after a run in 2006 at Primary Stages. Michael Wilson directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 20. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS
Martha Clarke's dance-theatre piece from 1984, derived from the Hieronymus Bosch painting, gets a revival. Opens Nov. 19. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

GEOMETRY OF FIRE
At the Rattlestick, Lucie Tiberghien directs Stephen Belber's play, about the relationship between an Iraq-war veteran and an Arab-American man he meets in a bar. In previews. Opens Nov. 24. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

GIMPEL TAM
Folksbiene presents a musical adaptation of Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story, written and directed by Moshe Yassur, about the victimization of a gullible orphan. In Yiddish with English supertitles. Previews begin Nov. 23. (JCC, 334 Amsterdam Ave. 800-595-4849.)

HILLARY: A MODERN GREEK TRAGEDY WITH A (SOMEWHAT) HAPPY ENDING
At Living Theatre, New Georges presents a comedy by Wendy Weiner, based on the lives of Hillary Rodham Clinton and her husband. Mia Barron and Darren Pettie star; Julie Kramer directs. Previews begin Nov. 22. Opens Nov. 24. (21 Clinton St. 212-868-4444.)

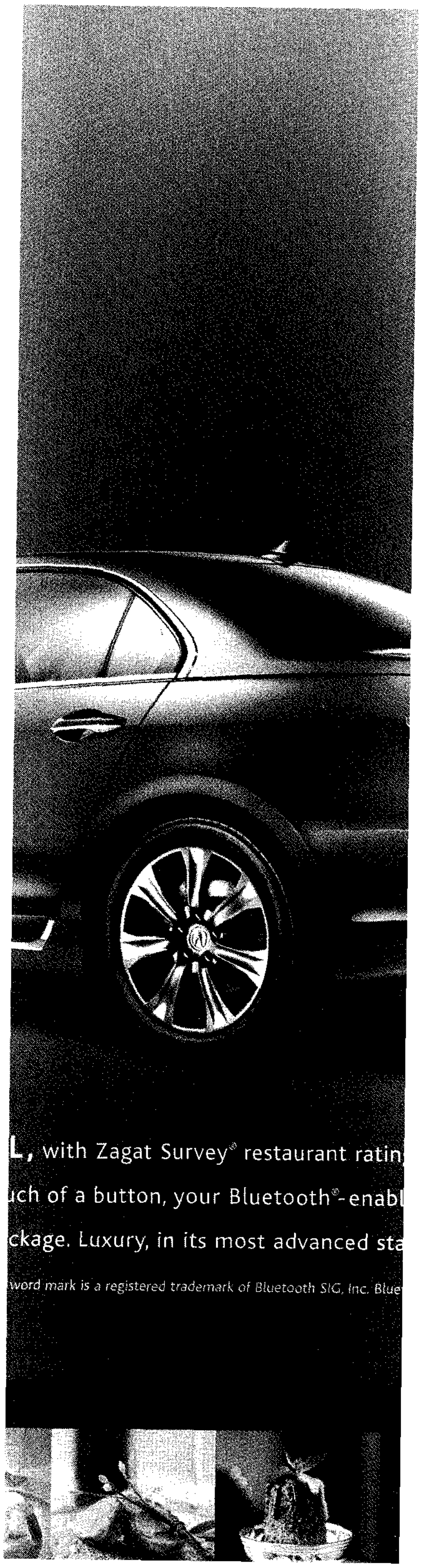
HOME
In Signature Theatre Company's second production of the Negro Ensemble Company season, three actors perform twenty-five roles in Samm-Art Williams's 1980 play. Set in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, it tells the story of a man who leaves his family in North Carolina and heads for New York City. In previews. (555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS
David Ives and Paul Blake adapted the classic film for this musical, just in time for the holidays. Walter Bobbie directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 23. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

ON THE TOWN
John Rando directs the 1944 musical, which has music by Leonard Bernstein and a book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Warren Carlyle choreographs. Nov. 19-23. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

PAL JOEY
At Studio 54, Roundabout Theatre Company presents the Rodgers and Hart musical from 1940, with a book adaptation by Richard Greenberg, in which an aspiring night-club owner leaves his girlfriend for a wealthy older woman. Joe Mantello directs a cast that includes Christian Hoff, Martha Plimpton, and Stockard Channing. In previews. (254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

PRAYER FOR MY ENEMY
Playwrights Horizons presents the New York première of a new play by Craig Lucas ("Prelude to



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HELP WANTED

With immaculate timing, Film Forum has scheduled a series of Carole Lombard films: the perfect response to recession, depression, and other ills, whether of the economy or the soul. One of her most glittering works, showing on Nov. 21 and Nov. 22, is "My Man Godfrey," directed by Gregory La Cava, from 1936. Lombard plays Irene Bullock, who scavenges a tramp (William Powell) from the city dump, to use as sport for socialites. He earns a place in her home, as a butler, and consequently in her heart, thus proving his status as one of nature's gentlemen. The title alone lampoons the idea that one American should ever own another. If the movie has worn as well as any screwball, it's because of the ferocious streak that courses through its revelry—not unlike the filthy laugh and the dirty looks with which Lombard punctuated her breathless chatter. Clad in silk, fluff, and loose pajamas, she bounces beautifully off Powell, who is suavity itself, and off the great Eugene Pallette. If anyone was born to play an angry man called Alexander Bullock, it was he.

—Anthony Lane

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/PHOTOFEST

a Kiss"), directed by Bartlett Sher, about an Iraq-war soldier and his alcoholic father, who is a Vietnam vet. Starring Victoria Clark, Michele Pawk, and Jonathan Groff. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SHREK THE MUSICAL
Dreamworks Theatricals presents the musical adaptation of the film, with a book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire ("Rabbit Hole") and music by Jeanine Tesori ("Caroline, or Change"). Jason Moore ("Avenue Q") directs; Brian d'Arcy James and Sutton Foster star. In previews. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

TAKING OVER
Danny Hoch wrote and performs this meditation on the gentrification of New York City, in a New York première. Tony Taccone directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 23. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

NOW PLAYING

BURY THE DEAD
Boundaries between the front lines and the home front are artfully interrogated in Transport Group's thought-provoking and adventurous revival of Irwin Shaw's 1936 antiwar play, set during a nameless future war, about dead soldiers who refuse to be buried. The director, Joe Calarco, has conceived the play as a reading of itself, and this Pirandello-esque device cleverly irons out almost everything that feels dated about the lightly absurdist drama. The result is a poignant metatheatrical meditation on life, death, and loss that suffers, nobly, only from its own ambition. The work of the original cast of thirty-two is shouldered bravely by seven actors, who fall short of bringing enough distinctiveness and nuance to their many roles. It isn't until the second half—when the soldiers meet their female counterparts—that they get a chance to settle down and shine. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101. Through Nov. 23.)

FARRAGUT NORTH
Beau Willimon's play goes behind the scenes of a ruthless Presidential campaign, in case you were looking for more where that came from. Stephen (the magnetic John Gallagher, Jr., from "Spring Awakening") is a twenty-five-year-old press secretary, silver-tongued and sharp-toothed, whose machinations always seem one step from self-destruction. Days before the Iowa caucuses, his ambitions knock up against his loyalty to the candidate and to his campaign manager (Chris Noth). Besides giving campaign junkies one last fix, Willimon's expertly plotted story, well served by Doug Hughes's direction, paints a convincing study of young ego. Stephen thrives on the dirty game of politics: is it inevitable, the play asks, that he become a reflection of it? (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

MINDGAME
A doltish pulp writer (Lee Godart) arrives at an asylum for the criminally insane in a remote area of Suffolk, England, to interview a mass murderer for his next book, and is instead himself interviewed at length by the head of the hospital, Dr. Farquhar (Keith Carradine). The eighty-one-year-old filmmaker Ken Russell has never directed a stage play before, and it shows: the first hour of what is meant to be a campy comedy is all dull talk and no action, and the second hour, which reveals yet another plot twist, is full of over-the-top, unfunny raving. Carradine seems to be the only person in the house, audience members included, who is having fun, which in itself seems a little crazy. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

MOUTH TO MOUTH
Kevin Elyot's 2001 play begins with Frank (David Cale), a blocked gay playwright with AIDS, jabbering about hospitals, drugs, and doctors, while his old friend Laura (Lisa Emery), a silent, attractive middle-aged woman, stares out the window, wearing sunglasses and chain-smoking with a tremor in her hand. From this minimal and mysterious opening, the play unfolds backward, in a series of strategic anecdotal scenes that tell a tale of lust, betrayal, and loss. At the center is Laura's buff son, Phillip (the excellent Christopher Abbott), the apple of his mother's eye and, we learn, of Frank's hungry heart. The tantalizing slickness of the play's construction is matched by a terse, elliptical narrative style. But tone and tact substitute for depth; instead of letting his characters find their meaning, Elyot imposes it on them. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/17/08.) (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ROMANTIC POETRY
On the subject of inadequacy, spare a thought, please, for the fine-voiced, hardworking cast of John Patrick Shanley's musical (directed by Shanley, who also wrote the book and lyrics, at the Manhattan Theatre Club), who are forced onstage without plot, personas, or point. It's a reckless, flabbergasting spectacle, like watching soldiers go into battle with popguns. Shanley writes in praise of the fire of life, the open heart, the big risk, and the search for some higher sense of self, beyond comfort and cash. Unfortunately, Shanley can't hang his essay on any plausible characters or predicaments. For the audience, there is no one to care for and nothing to believe in; there is only the sound of Shanley's self-congratulatory voice. (11/17/08) (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SATURN RETURNS
Noah Haidle ("Mr. Marmalade," "Vigils") is a young playwright whose most prodigious gift may be his psychological sophistication. Beautifully written and well mounted, his latest drama is about memory and pathological mourning, in which loss is shown as a source of control as well as grief. The title refers to three emotional turning points in the life of a man; the limpid play is really a haunting, in which Haidle finds a way of dramatizing the presence of absence in all of us. Nicholas Martin expertly orchestrates the poignant ironies, and the finesse of the writing is matched by an expert ensemble that includes Robert Eli, John McMartin, James Rebhorn, and Rosie Benton. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

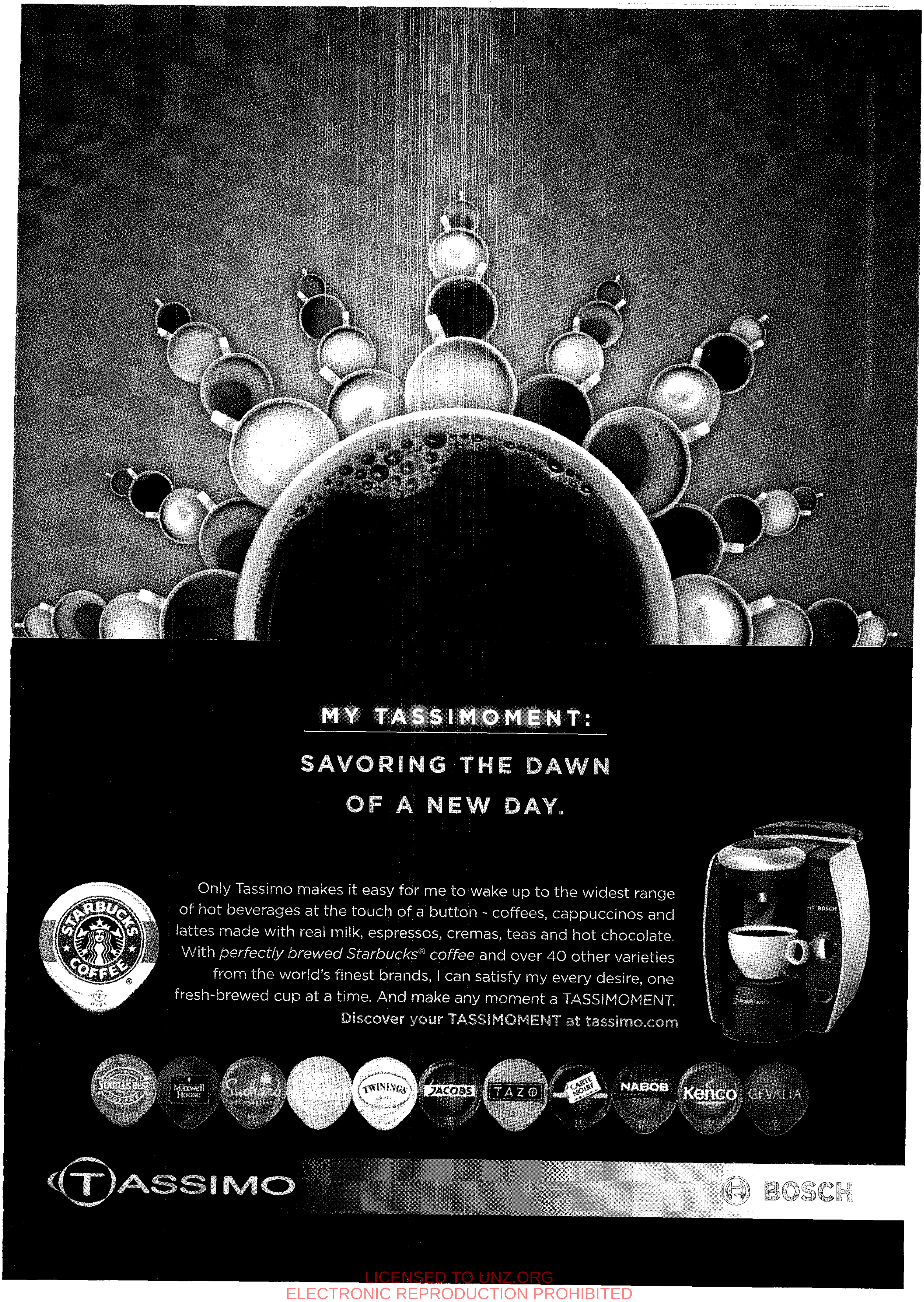
SLEEPWALK WITH ME
The comedian Mike Birbiglia's theatrical début (co-produced by Nathan Lane and directed by Seth Barrish) is a monologue about his experiences with a sleepwalking condition that causes him to act out his dreams. In funny, terrifying vignettes, he describes how he avoided going to doctors for years despite clear evidence that he should: while asleep, he jumped out of bed (to fight a hovering insect-jackal), he climbed on top of a bookshelf (to accept a prize in the Dustbuster Olympics), and he threw a chest of drawers (at Brad Pitt). Birbiglia's narrative is intricately layered; he tells stories within stories, some familiar from his standup, some openly personal. Each raises the dramatic stakes, locating the specific sources of his anxiety—parents, relationships, growing up—in situations so universal that, by the time he jumps through a plate-glass window at a hotel in Walla Walla, Washington, his incredible story somehow seems like it could be our own. (Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

STREAMERS
Roundabout Theatre Company presents David Rabe's drama from 1976. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WAVES
Lincoln Center's Great Performers "New Visions" series includes the National Theatre's production of a play derived from Virginia Woolf's novel "The Waves," directed by Katie Mitchell. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-721-6500. Through Nov. 22.)

Also Playing

ALL MY SONS: Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLACK WATCH:** St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn.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718-254-8779. **BLASTED:** SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE GRAND INQUISITOR:** New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **IRENA'S VOW:** Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101. Through Nov. 25. **THE LANGUAGE OF TREES:** Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE SEAGULL:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Nov. 20: The ska-punk of Southern California's **Aquabats.** Nov. 23: L.A.'s early-eighties roots-rock pioneers the **Blasters.** Nov. 25-26: When twentieth-century blues musicians like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf plugged in, they put together bands that became prototypes for countless rock groups that followed. **Hubert Sumlin** was Wolf's longtime guitarist, laying down iconic riffs on such classics as "Built for Comfort," "300 Pounds of Joy," and "Killing Floor." He's celebrating his seventy-seventh birthday in the company of **John Sebastian, David Johansen, Jimmy Vivino, Levon Helm,** and other admirers.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 19: The Charlotte, North Carolina, native **Anthony Hamilton** grew up singing gospel, and he delivers his old-school R. & B. with a religious intensity.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 25: **Alice Smith,** a local singer with a four-octave range, favors ambitious and insightful R. & B. that has an earthy flair and a sensuous edge.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 19: **Meat Beat Manifesto,** one of the more adventurous bands to emerge from the British industrial scene, combined elements of techno, house music, old-school hip-hop, and rock and blazed a new trail in electronic dance music. The group's most recent album, "Autoimmune," shows that the talents of its mastermind, Jack Dangers, haven't dulled. **Excepter,** a local outfit that makes unwieldy, psychedelic noise rock, opens the proceedings.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Nov. 21: The **Nightwatchman** is the Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello's agitprop-folk alter ego. Let's hope that he has been encouraged by the outcome of the election and will be in a less sombre mood than usual.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 21: Seeing **Brian Wilson** these days can be a little uncomfortable: the too-broad gestures, the slightly dissociated speech. But he surrounds himself with a big, versatile group that can play—and sing—anything the Beach Boys ever did (Paul McCartney calls them "the best touring band in the world"). He'll perform the entirety of his new record, "That Lucky Old Sun," and some of his greatest hits.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Nov. 21-22: The **Roches** started out in the city, and it looks like they're going to finish up that way, too: they've decided to stop touring. Luckily, the gently squabbling sisters will still carry their delicious, quirky three-part harmonies to the wilds of West Chelsea. They'll be preceded by Suzzy and Loudon's daughter, **Lucy Wainwright Roche,** whose voice gains in richness with every outing.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Nov. 21: **Robin Holcomb** and **Flutterbox** offer an evening of original, unusual tunes. The challenge is what to label it: Art-folk? Haiku-jazz? Holcomb, an inventive singer, composer, and pianist, was a driving force in the downtown music scene of the eighties before settling in Seattle. She'll be playing old and new songs, accompanied by Doug Wieselman (on guitar, clarinet, saxophone) and Tony Scherr (on bass and vocals). Flutterbox is a duo: the composer Neill Cardinal Furio coaxes a wide array of sounds from the electric bass as Janine Nichols sings. Nichols describes Furio's songs as "a cross between Neil Sedaka and Samuel Beckett."

92Y TRIBECA
200 Hudson St., at Canal St. (212-601-1000)—Nov. 22: The **Hackensaw Boys,** from Charlottesville, Virginia, tear apart mountain music with revved-up flair.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 19: The red-state rockers **Hinder** play meat-and-potatoes grunge-informed music that clings to the clichés of the genre while subtracting its most exciting elements. It's turned out to be surprisingly lucrative for them.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Nov. 22: The singer-songwriter **Lucy Kaplansky.** Nov. 23: **Huun-Huur-Tu,** a group of musicians from Tuva, a small republic in the southern-Siberian fold above Mongolia, practice the art of *khoomei,* or throat singing. With **Hazmat Modine,** a local group incorporating everything from harmonicas, tubas, drums, and lap-steel guitar work to trumpet playing. Huun-Huur-Tu even joined them on their début album, "Bahamut."

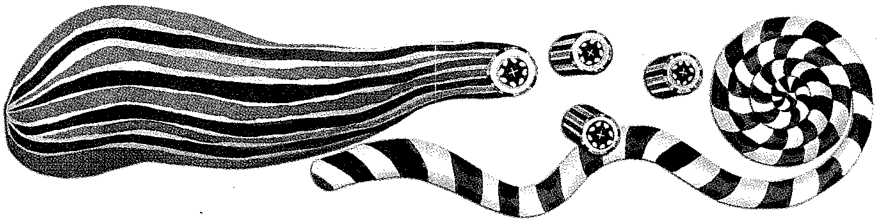
SYMPHONY SPACE
Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Nov. 21: **Robyn Hitchcock.** At some point during this show, featuring a revisit to his 1983 album, "I Often Dream of Trains," Hitchcock will launch into a stream-of-consciousness monologue so complicated, cohesive, and funny that you'll swear it's a prepared bit. Then he'll react to a statement from a bandmate or veer off cogently and poetically in a completely unexpected direction and you'll have to admit that the guy really is that brilliant. His slightly psychedelic jangle-pop is great, too.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 19-22: The singer **Tierney Sutton** has a winning style and a striking presence, and the unity of her longstanding quintet is undeniable.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 18-23: The Brazilian songsmith **Ivan Lins** delivers suggestive harmonies and buoyant rhythms that cut through the slickness of his pop-fusion presentation. He's joined here by the eclectic quartet **New York Voices.** Nov. 24: **Matthew Shipp,** solo. The pianist Shipp was once part of the tenor saxophonist David S. Ware's quartet and an integral component in orchestrating its celebratory squall. On his own, Shipp is capable of balancing his post-Cecil Taylor keyboard eruptions with lyric calm—or, depending on his mood, not.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 18-20: Celebrating her eightieth birthday, the singer **Sheila Jordan** can look back at a career virtually free of commercial compromise. If her voice has faltered a bit, the inventiveness and dar-



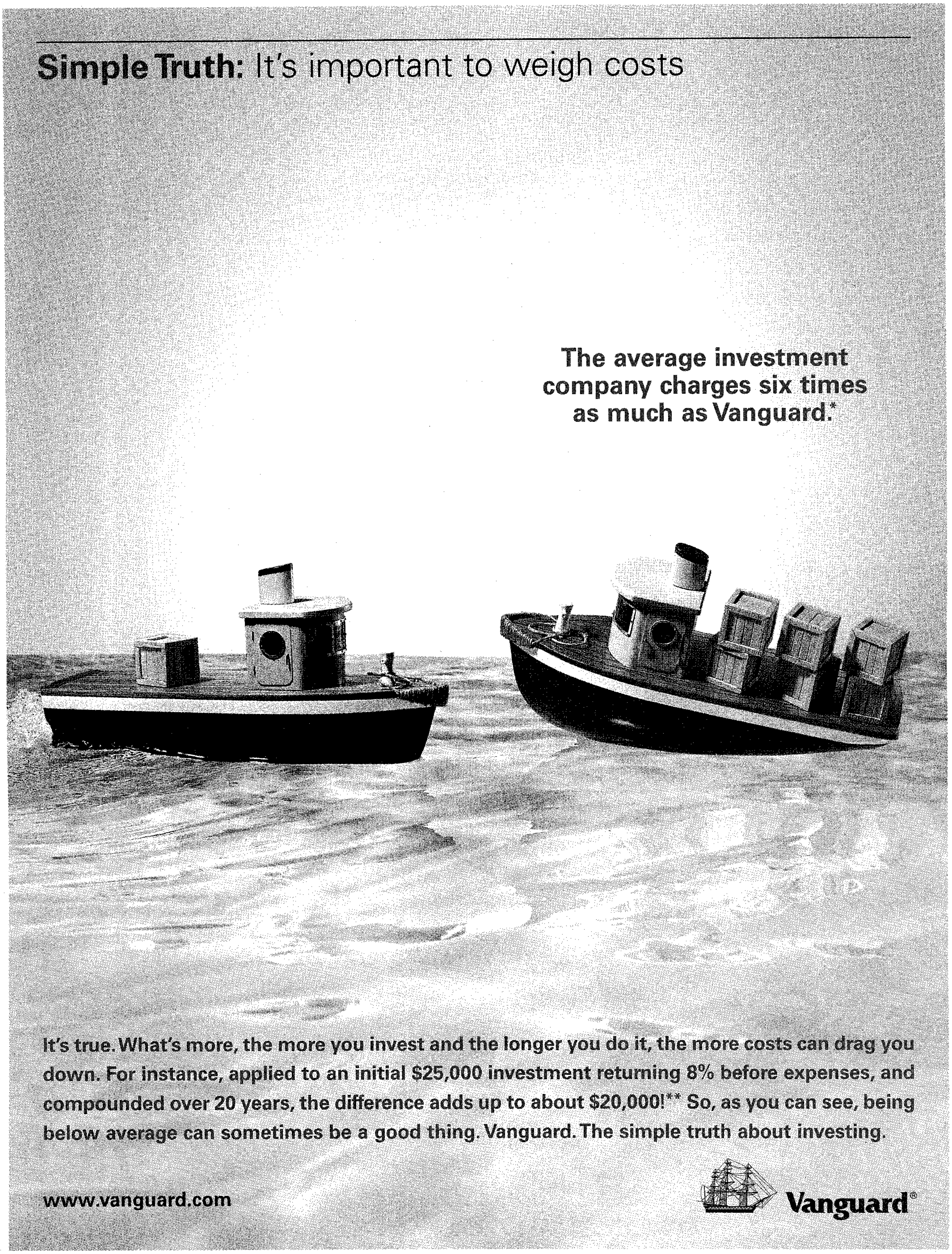
SILJA GÖTZ

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

PAPABUBBLE

380 Broome St. (212-966-2599)—Remember those pallid sourballs petrifying in the dish on your grandmother's coffee table? They are still there, even if your grandmother isn't. The sweets at Papabubble, on the other hand, may well have been confected today—you can witness a batch of hard candy being made every couple of hours in the out-front kitchen that is also a stage. There's something transfixing about watching molten sugar being turned into beautiful goo, and then kneaded and pulled into colorful canes that a Venetian glassblower would be proud to claim. This tiny shop is the latest branch of a franchise that originated in Barcelona and has outposts in Tokyo and Amsterdam. The place is nothing spectacular to look at—neither cutesy, like Dylan's Candy Bar, nor Ye Olde, like an ersatz penny-candy emporium. With its pale-green walls, steel tables, and beakers filled with glowing liquid food colorings, Papabubble feels more like the stockroom of an underfunded science lab. There are lollipops shaped like Christmas trees, and candy rings to be worn on your finger (I dare you). The goodies in the Math Mix are shaped like pencil erasers, and although none is longer than a quarter inch, each is embedded with a numeral or a symbol. The sugary specimens in the New York assortment have the names of the five boroughs printed inside. You can also special order custom lollipops three feet in diameter and candy portraits based on photographs. The candy comes in grownup flavors such as pear-bergamot, grapefruit-basil, and orange-cardamom, but there are also some—passion fruit, kiwi, apple, and lemon—that would appeal to a sophisticated child. The mango-red-chili-pepper pebbles might be the spiciest thing calling itself candy these days. You want chocolate? Get an egg cream down the block. The only chocolate in evidence here is a delicious filling surrounded by an equally delicious hard coffee sheath, in the striped pillow candy. In sum, the offerings at Papabubble are nothing like Grandma's sourballs, whose flavors were so insipid that we would simply call them by their colors. As a young visitor on a field trip to the shop put it, "The candy here tastes like freedom." Or, in the words of a taller customer, "This is what's cool about gentrification, man."

—Patricia Marx



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ing that first brought her attention in the late fifties remain in evidence. Her new album, "Winter Sunshine," is her twenty-first release.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Nov. 18-29: **Chita Rivera.** The Tony-winning legend is still agile and game to entertain after more than five decades on the stage.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The past decade has seen a flowering of gifted young trumpeters who are well versed in post-bop forms but willing to expand upon them. Among the more promising is **Jeremy Pelt,** whose quintet (here Nov. 20-23) includes **J. D. Allen** on tenor saxophone.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 18-23: **Ravi Coltrane,** having successfully dodged his father's looming shadow despite playing the same instruments (tenor and soprano saxophone), has firmly established himself as one of the more capable players of his generation. Like his father, Coltrane has maintained a cohesive quartet; Ravi's includes the gifted pianist **Luis Perdomo.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

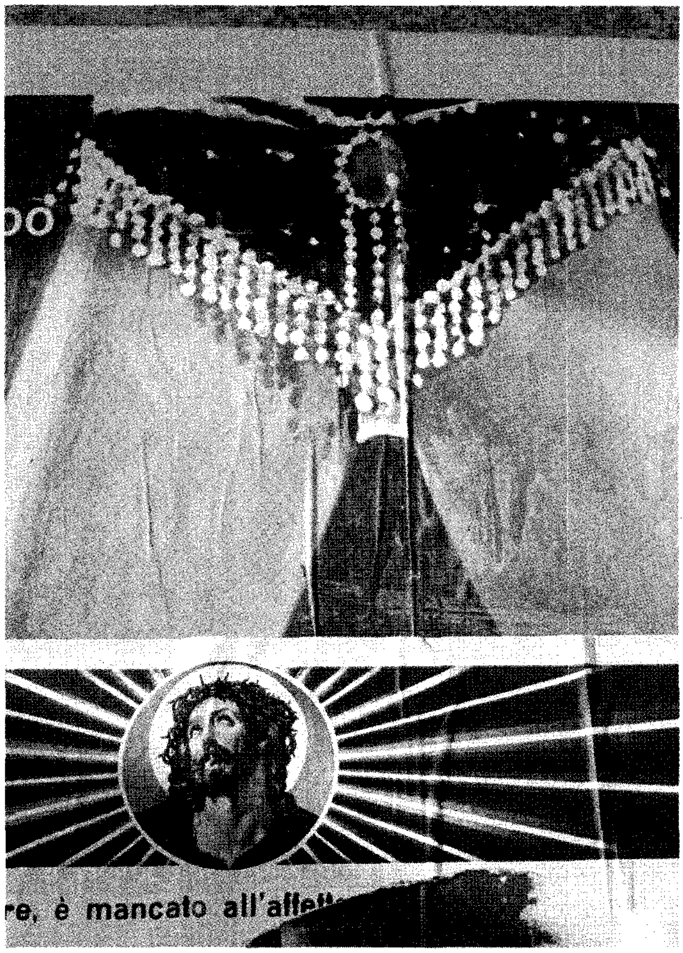
ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** The museum's soon-to-be-former director retires in the glow of an exhibition that highlights some three hundred of the eighty-four thousand acquisitions made during his thirty-one years on the job. The objects are installed according to the chronology of the gift or purchase rather than by genre, which makes for a splendid jumble. A red-and-yellow Rothko overlooks armor, silver, furniture, and an exquisite limestone relief of a languid hand, carved in Egypt circa 1349-36 B.C. A quartet of tempera paintings of Biblical sages, made by Lorenzo Monaco circa 1408-10, rhymes with a grid of water towers photographed by Bernd and Hilla Becher between 1967 and 1980. The glorious mash-up continues with jewelry, musical instruments, drawings, bronzes, ivories, illuminated manuscripts, and couture. It's an embarrassment of riches and a round-the-world tour, which is not to be missed—the vaults don't open like this very often. Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Royal Porcelain from the Twinight Collection: 1800-1850."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End."** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937."** Through Jan. 12. ♦ **"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night."** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **"Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie."** Through Dec. 1. ♦ **"New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky."** Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Theanyspacewhatever."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Catherine Opie: American Photographer."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Signs of the Times."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)



"Modena, 1973," by Luigi Ghirri, at Aperture.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Opens Nov. 21. ♦ **"Gilbert & George."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** This is the first exhibition drawn from the museum's collection since it opened the Sackler Center for Feminist Art last year. Works by such icons as the late Hannah Wilke (filmed doing a striptease behind Marcel Duchamp's "Large Glass"), Adrian Piper (whose video installation uses windows to symbolize racial divides), and Carolee Schneeman (whose notorious "Interior Scroll" performance is seen in a photograph) are accompanied by those of younger but no less outspoken women including Tracey Emin and Tracey Moffatt. (The show proves that men—Ward Shelley, Nayland Blake—can be feminists, too.) The video testimonials installed on iPhones throughout the galleries are a nice touch—even if they find most of the artists flummoxed by the question of how to define feminist art. Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"The Seduction of Light: Ammi Phillips/Mark Rothko, Compositions in Pink, Green, and Red."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Martin Ramirez: The Last Works."** Through April 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Art and China's Revolution."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Writing the Word of God: Calligraphy and the Qur'an."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 5.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Wall Stories: Children's Wallpaper and Books."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Solos: Tulou/Affordable Housing for China."** Through April 5. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze."** Through Jan. 18. ♦ **"Frick's Vermeers Reunited."** Through Nov. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Susan Meiselas: In History."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"America and the Tintype."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Cornell Capa: Concerned Photographer."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Living with the Dead: W. Eugene Smith and World War II."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theatre, 1919-1949."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

PALITZ GALLERY
11 E. 61st St. (212-754-5121)—**"Michelangelo: The Man and the Myth."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 7. To purchase tickets, visit ticketweb.com.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Museum as Hub: Six Degrees."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Gino De Dominicis."** The Italian artist, who died in 1998 at the age of fifty-one, was always elusive: he an-

nounced his own death in 1969. His quicksilver wit and sly sensibility are echoed in the work of his countryman Maurizio Cattelan. Here, De Dominicis is represented by a good selection of paintings and drawings (almost all of them untitled). Colors are bold, often augmented by gold and silver leaf; exaggerated Roman profiles recur, rendered with a surprisingly delicate touch. The sculptures and films are more fun, notably the 1970 film of the artist trying to learn how to fly, "maybe because I was never able to swim." In the basement gallery, a recording of maniacal laughter plays on an endless loop; whether you experience it as demonic or contagious, you'll doubtless feel in on the joke. Through Feb. 9. ♦ **"Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool."** A small swimming pool has been set in a wooden deck like a shimmering jewel. The first hint that all is not as it seems is olfactory: there's no chlorine tang cutting the smell of fresh lumber. But the kicker comes when someone in the gallery's lower level walks through water, looking up at you, aquanaut-style. Once the trick is revealed, the fascination evaporates like a wet footprint on a sunny day. Through April 13. ♦ **"Yael Bartana."** Through Jan. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool."** Through March 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

RICHARD BENSON
Benson, revered for his expertise as a printer of photographs, shows a group of modestly scaled color ink-jet prints made using a process he devised, which allows for a layering of images. The results, Benson feels, are truer to the original subject and far more realistic than those made using any previous process. That may well be true. Unfortunately, it doesn't make Benson's American landscapes interesting as anything more than exercises. His technical achievement would be easier to appreciate if the photographs themselves were more vivid and inspired. Through Nov. 29. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

Short List

LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN: Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Nov. 20. **HELEN FRANKENTHALER:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through Jan. 10. **PABLO PICASSO:** Acquavella, 18 E. 79th St. 212-734-6300. Through Nov. 29. **CINDY SHERMAN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through Dec. 20. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Dec. 13. **ALEXI WORTH:** D. C. Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at W. 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through Jan. 3.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DAVID FENTON
Fenton was just sixteen in 1968, when the earliest photographs in this exhibition were taken, and only nineteen when the last ones were made, in 1971. For much of that time, he was working at the Liberation News Service and his beat was the counterculture in all its manifestations, from Be-Ins, Smoke-Ins, and rock concerts to Black Panther rallies, protest marches, and antiwar demonstrations. With the passion and agility of youth, Fenton worked the front lines of a movement that aspired to be a revolution, and his best pictures have lost none of their agitated, fired-up zeal. Through Nov. 26. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

ANN LISLEGAARD
Two digital projections translate science-fiction stories into animation, with mixed results. Lislegaard bases her multi-screen black-and-white works on Ursula K. Le Guin's novel "The Left

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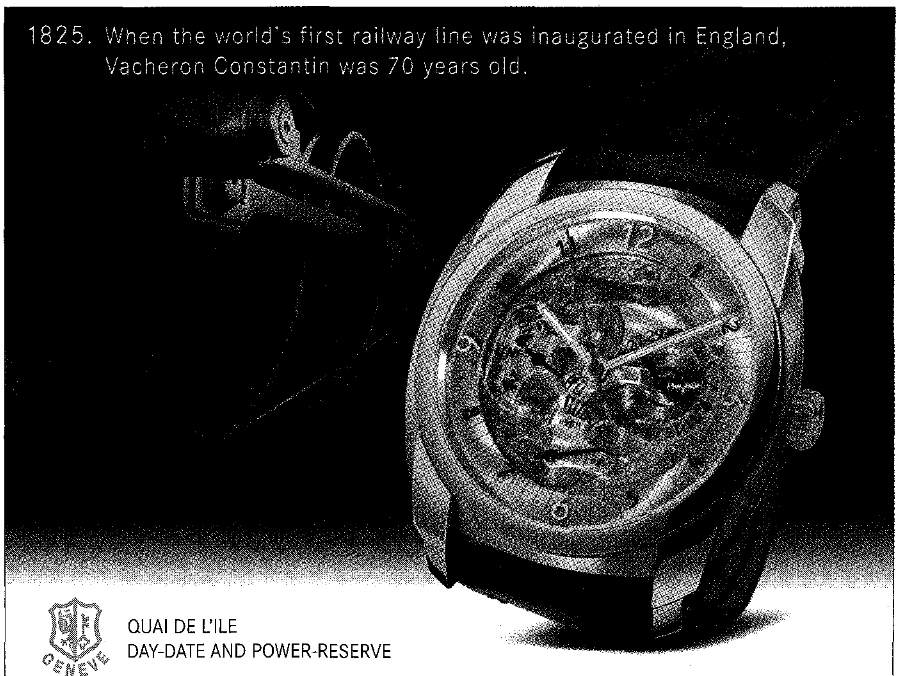

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Hand of Darkness," about an ice planet populated by gender-neutral humanoids, and on J. G. Ballard's "The Crystal World," in which a cancerous crystal invades the rain forest. Lislegaard throws in period-appropriate references (the crystallographic works of Robert Smithson, for example). But despite the beauty of her overlaid anatomical drawings in "Left Hand" or the seething jungle foliage in "Crystal," the aggressively virtual, coldly graphic scenes never quite capture the sexy environmental dread—or the satirical weirdness—of their sources. Through Dec. 13. (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.)

Russia haven't been exhibited here before, and they help put the newer material into perspective. Like a number of her contemporaries, Sarfati juxtaposes portraits, interiors, and landscapes to build both a larger picture and a mood—in this case, one of dissolution, isolation, and ennui that edges into desperation. The young men and women in her photographs appear to be both stuck and drifting; the environments, if not outright ruins, are so grimy and makeshift they could be stage sets. This might be mistaken for realism, but it's something much more complex and compelling. Through Dec. 6. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

TABLES FOR TWO
CONVIVIO

45 Tudor City Pl., near 42nd St., (212-599-5045)—Tudor City is an odd part of town, a puzzle of dead ends. Convivio, at the heart of it, replicates its screwy feng shui. If you walk in and feel confused—by the cramped, half-hidden bar, by the fact that it's no longer L'Impero, by the narrow path to the trio of steely hostesses who may acknowledge your reservation but who, after an hour, fail to honor it (actual remark, in response to a fifth how-does-it-look prompt: "I thought I'd seated you already")—you may think that you are in a restaurant-anxiety dream: mouths wide shut. But no. Convivio, once you're at a table, in a nifty swivel chair, and savoring a repentant round of hors d'ouevres (called *sfizi* here), is real, and dreamy, in the best sense of the word. An attentive but laid-back waitress who looks a bit like Jennifer Connelly dispenses unassailable recommendations, and before long you are eating exotic animal parts and exquisite pastas that live up to all the avid things your dinner companions have heard about them, and about their maker, the chef Michael White.

As usual, the application of the delicate to the brutish elevates the experience of dining on ultra-lipids. For example, the pickled watermelon rind and crunchy fennel seeds that come with the *testa*, a pig's-head terrine (the inevitable remark: "That's good head"), and the pickled onions and thin slices of hard-boiled egg that come with the lingua, a rosary of veal tongues. (A minority opinion: "It needs more acid.") The pastas, which are homemade, are distinct and astonishing. Taste aside, the textural refinement of the saffron gnocchetti, with flecks of crab and sea urchin, and of the tortelli—filled but not stuffed with ricotta and *guanciale* and floating in a Pecorino sauce—represent the latest and highest repudiation of the old bachelor trick of throwing the spaghetti at the wall to see if it's cooked. There's a fine array of fish and beast, but in Tudor City, apparently, starch is king. The popular side dish of roasted potatoes is like a daydream about donuts, with Pecorino shavings in place of powdered sugar. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and weekends for dinner. Entrées $26-$33.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

ENRIQUE METINIDES
It may be a facile shorthand, but Metinides is the Weegee of Mexico—a tabloid news photographer drawn to small-scale catastrophes and the ordinary people involved in them. Most active from the nineteen-forties through the seventies, he had killer instincts and a great eye, both apparent in this group of small, vintage car-crash pictures. The photographs' blunt, matter-of-fact quality makes them all the more surreal. One car sits intact just inside the ragged hole that it made in a brick wall, but most are smashed into instant sculptures. Injured passengers feature in only a few shots, but those are as riveting and awful as any of Warhol's "Disasters." Through Dec. 6. (Bienvenu, 529 W. 20th St. 212-206-7990.)

LISA SANDITZ
Sanditz is not the first artist to tackle the landscape of globalization—the photographers Edward Burtynsky and Andreas Gursky have been there for years. But she is a painter, which liberates "Sock City," her show about China's single-industry towns—devoted to the manufacture of underwear, shoes, wooden toys, and so on—from the realm of the strictly documentarian. Sanditz's hallucinatory canvases, which range from the smog-choked "Christmas for Export" to the Times Square-bright "Xiamen, LED City," have a familiar, faux-outsider look more redolent of West Chelsea than industrial China. But her freewheeling hand, whimsical use of perspective, and knack for color make for a refreshing show. Through Nov. 29. (CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-229-2766.)

LISE SARFATI
This Paris-based photographer has been working in the U.S. recently, but her earlier pictures from Russia haven't been exhibited here before, and they help put the newer material into perspective.

KELLEY WALKER
Walker constructs a post-minimalist fun house of post-Pop references articulated in a post-Conceptual idiom—which is no mean feat. Visitors are enticed into a room of free-standing mirrored panels framed in Crayola-hued metal; a disco ball, colored lights, and pixellated posters of Whitney Houston establish an outmoded, in-crowd mood. Propped against the walls in the adjacent gallery are silk-screened paintings—digitally manipulated versions of pages from the New York *Times* and *Wall Street Journal*—overlaid with patterns of bricks. Art is a walled-off, recyclable spectacle—all yesterday's parties, another newsworthy current event. Through Dec. 13. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

Short List

TOMMA ABTS: Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 23. **ANNE CHU:** 303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121. Through Dec. 20. **RICHARD DUPONT:** Nitsch, 534 W. 22nd St. 212-645-2030. Through Jan. 31. **BARNABY FURNAS:** Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889. Through Dec. 20. **LUIGI GHIRRI:** Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. Through Jan. 29. 212-505-555. **ANDREAS GURSKY:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Dec. 24. **DANA HOEY:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Dec. 20. **HIROSHI SUGIMOTO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. **JACKIE WINSOR:** Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Nov. 29. **TERRY WINTERS:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Jan. 24. **"THE FLOWERS OF EVIL STILL BLOOM":** Cueto Project, 551 W. 21st St. 212-229-2221. Through Jan. 4. **"LOOKING BACK":** White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through Dec. 13.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
To mark the opening of its winter season and the inauguration of the newly named David H. Koch Theatre, the company presents an evening of ballets set to music by American composers. The gala includes no fewer than four works by Peter Martins (the company's artistic director), including his "Chichester Psalms," from 2004; an excerpt from Jerome Robbins's elegiac "Ives, Songs" is paired with one from Balanchine's own darkly mysterious take on Ives, "Ivesiana." The program also includes excerpts from Susan Stroman's "Duke!" and Balanchine's Gershwin tribute "Who Cares?" Then it's all waltzing snowflakes till the New Year. (Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Nov. 25 at 7.)

COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET
The sexy, stylish troupe run by Desmond Richardson and Dwight Rhoden returns to the Joyce for two weeks. The first week features three premières by Rhoden, including "Rise," in which ten of U2's greatest hits provide a steady beat to help anchor the choreographer's busy manner, and "I Will Not Be Broken," in which Richardson channels his virtuosity into a survivor dance on a bench. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 18-19 and Nov. 25 at 7:30, Nov. 21 at 8, Nov. 22 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 23 at 2 and 7:30. Through Nov. 30.)

"LES ÉCAILLES DE LA MÉMOIRE"
This collaboration between the men of Senegal's Compagnie Jant-Bi and the ladies of Brooklyn's own Urban Bush Women focusses, in a visceral fashion, on the African diaspora that connects and divides the participants. The gender difference supplies some sexual tension and tried-and-true humor, but the emphasis is on suffering and struggle transformed into joy, tribulations overcome by communal strength. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Nov. 19 and Nov. 21-22 at 7:30.)

BETH GILL
"What It Looks Like, What It Feels Like" emerges out of the young choreographer's ongoing investigation of compositional form. In her new all-female quartet, Gill's constructions and deconstructions, already foregrounded by the abstracting, deliberate effect of her dancers, are further clarified by means of a square grid on the floor. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Nov. 20-22 at 8.)

ANDONIS FONIADAKIS
In the seemingly endless procession of dance works set to Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," we get yet another. The Greek choreographer Foniadakis has created a solo for a female dancer, stripping her to near-nakedness, decorating her in war paint, and unleashing her in a neo-primitivist visualization that alternates between animalistic movement and depictions of aggression, physical torment, and ecstasy. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Nov. 20-22 at 8 and Nov. 23 at 3 and 8.)

RISA JAROSLOW & DANCERS
In Jaroslow's "Sixty," the passage of time isn't so much mourned as noted. (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Nov. 20-22 at 8:30.)

ERICK HAWKINS DANCE COMPANY
A choreographer's work all too often drifts toward obscurity after the artist's death; so it has been with Erick Hawkins, the man who in 1938 became the first male dancer in Martha Graham's company. As part of the 92nd Street Y's "Fridays at Noon," the current director of (and former dancer in) Hawkins's ensemble, Katherine Duke, presents works by Hawkins and his collaborator Lucia Dlugoszewski, revealing his Zen-influenced, free-flowing technique. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 21 at noon.)

NEW CHAMBER BALLET
The musically astute choreographer Miro Magloire's new trio, set to Dvořák's "Four Romantic Pieces," offers subtle shifts of mood and supple phrasing,

NATALIE MATUTSCHOVSKY

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HYBRID

which the twentieth-century works Magloire usually gravitates toward tend to lack. Other pieces by Magloire include "Dreams," an experiment set to sounds and words emitted by the dancers themselves, and forays into the music of Stockhausen and the Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi, intelligently interpreted by Magloire's capable dancers and topnotch instrumentalists. (City Center Studio 4, at 130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. Nov. 22-23 at 8.)

SAEKO ICHINOHE DANCE COMPANY
The earnest and venerable New York-based troupe honors what many scholars consider the thousandth anniversary of Lady Murasaki's classic novel "The Tale of Genji." The dancers, attired in long-trained robes, draw on both Kabuki and Bugaku, the court form of Murasaki's time. (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-757-2531. Nov. 22 at 8 and Nov. 23 at 3.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"
The increasingly adventurous preview series presents a fusion of John Zorn's new musical setting of the Old Testament "Song of Songs" with a dance by the Cambodian-American choreographer Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, for her Phnom Penh-based Khmer Arts Ensemble. In her work, Shapiro employs the very specialized aesthetics of Cambodian dance—curled-back fingers, hyperextended arms, sculptural poses, and opulent gold-laced costumes—while Zorn is a born eclecticist, having tried his hand at everything from punk jazz to klezmer. Who knows, it just might work. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Nov. 23-24 at 7:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Anthony Minghella's production of **"Madama Butterfly,"** now in its third season at the Met, remains the signature project of Peter Gelb's revitalizing tenure at the company. Carolyn Choa, wife of the late director, stages the revival faithfully; the puppeteers of Blind Summit Theatre contribute their special wizardry, executing the fades, pans, and closeups of Minghella's cinematic theatrical language. With Patricia Racette (a splendid Butterfly), Roberto Aronica, Dwayne Croft, and Maria Zifchak; Patrick Summers conducts. (Nov. 19 and Nov. 22 at 8.) ♦ The final performance of **"La Traviata,"** with Anja Harteros, Massimo Giordano, and Andrzej Dobber; Paolo Carignani. (Nov. 20 at 8.) ♦ During Seiji Ozawa's long and sometimes dispiriting tenure at the helm of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, he always made his finest impression when taking charge of a great canvas of a score—as in his many concert performances of operas. After more than fifteen years, he returns to the Met to lead Elijah Moshinsky's richly atmospheric production of Tchaikovksy's **"The Queen of Spades,"** with the estimable Maria Guleghina, Felicity Palmer, and Ben Heppner featured in the cast. (Nov. 21 and Nov. 24 at 8.) ♦ Interactivity comes to the Met with **"La Damnation de Faust,"** the thrilling, quasi-operatic oratorio by Berlioz. Robert Lepage's production superimposes fantastical video images (which fluctuate according to the singers' movements and voices) upon a giant scaffold of a set; it also allows the cast (which includes a dexterous group of acrobats) to defy the strictures of space and gravity that would normally limit the visual potential of Goethe's diabolical tale. With mostly solid singing from Marcello Giordani, John Relyea, Susan Graham, and, of course, the Met chorus; the orchestra plays magnificently under James Levine. (Nov. 22 at 8 and Nov. 25 at 9.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

"ENCORES!": "ON THE TOWN"
Carnegie Hall's Leonard Bernstein festival moves its base camp down the street to City Center, where the hall's popular series of semi-staged revivals of neglected musicals will embrace this gleeful 1944 show, with music by Bernstein, about three thrill-seeking sailors on shore leave. The cast features Tony Yazbeck, Christian Borle, and Andrea Martin; John Rando directs. (130 W. 56th St. 212-581-1212. Nov. 19-21 and Nov. 23 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 2 and 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Alisa Weilerstein, a fiercely expressive young cellist, is Lorin Maazel's guest for his return to the podium after several weeks away. She should prove a persuasive advocate for the Cello Concerto No. 2 by Penderecki—written in 1982, the year she was born. Also on the program are Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 20 at 7:30, Nov. 21 at 11 A.M., and Nov. 22 at 8.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
In a special Bernstein Festival event, the Philharmonic gives Avery Fisher Hall over to the topnotch student ensemble, which Alan Gilbert will conduct in the Third Symphonies of Beethoven ("Eroica") and Bernstein ("Kaddish")—an ambitious pairing. The soprano Jennifer Zetlan, the speaker Samuel Pisar, the Oratorio Society of New York, and the Young People's Chorus of New York City assist. (212-875-5656. Nov. 24 at 8.)

THE DESSOFF CHOIRS:
"THE LEGACY OF DAVID"
The Psalmist King and his wondrous words are the focus for the strong avocational choir's latest concert, an evening featuring works by Thomas Weelkes, Randall Thompson, and, not least, Honegger's magisterial oratorio "King David." (St. James's Church, Madison Ave. at 71st St. 212-831-8224. Nov. 20 at 8.)

DRESDEN STAATSKAPELLE
The ancient German ensemble is touring the U.S. under the command of its new musical director, Fabio Luisi (who has distinguished himself at the Met). Nov. 21 at 8: A notable veteran, the pianist Rudolf Buchbinder, joins the orchestra for a program that includes Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major and Brahms's Fourth Symphony. ♦ Nov. 23 at 3: A muscular all-Strauss program—"Don Quixote" and "Ein Heldenleben"—features the vibrant young cellist Jan Vogler. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

RECITALS

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG
Two magnetic young singers from the Met—the mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey and the tenor Joseph Kaiser—join Steven Blier, at the piano, in songs by a raft of composers forced to leave Hitler's Germany, such as Korngold, Zemlinsky, Schreker, and Weill. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Nov. 18 and Nov. 20 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "NIGHT FANTASIES"
In four concerts exploring the mystery of night, the Society conjures up the spirit of the legendary Römerbad Musiktage festival, which Klaus Lauer curated at a Black Forest hotel for more than three decades. Such musicians as the pianists Gilbert Kalish and Pierre-Laurent Aimard and the Pacifica Quartet perform works by Debussy, Carter, Crumb, and Chopin, among others; for details (and an enticing video presentation), see www.chambermusicsociety.org/nf. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-875-5788. Nov. 20-22 at 7:30 and Nov. 23 at 5.)

EMANUEL AX AND YEFIM BRONFMAN
Two old friends and keyboard lions (with strikingly divergent artistic temperaments) collaborate in music for two pianos by Brahms (the "Haydn Variations"), Mozart, Rachmaninoff (the Symphonic Dances), and Bolcom. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 21 at 8.)

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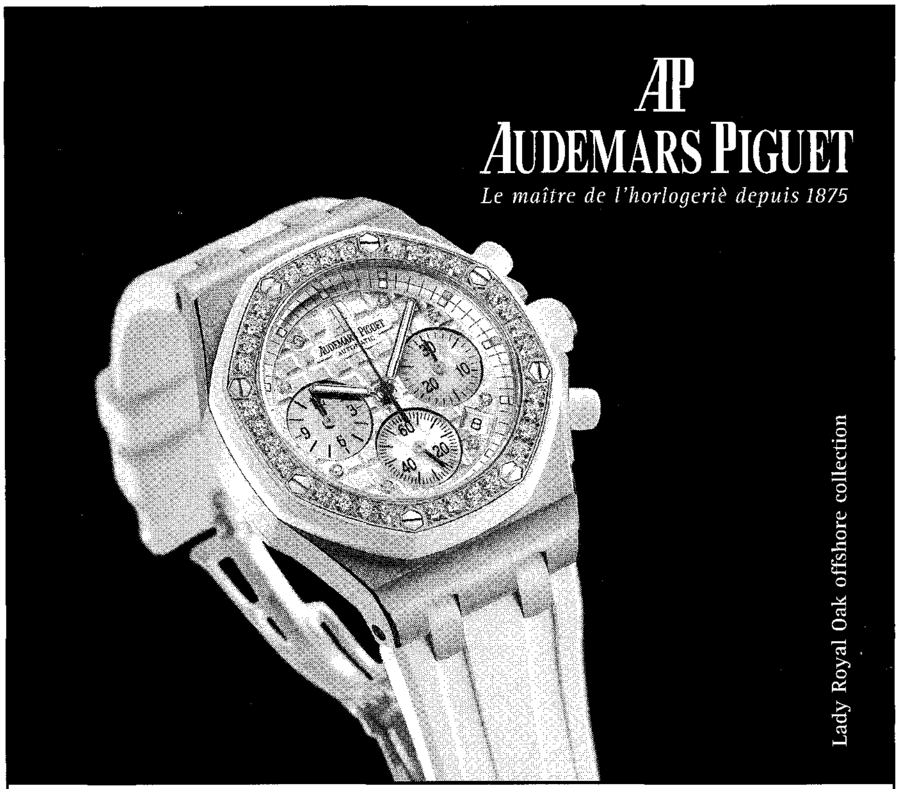
Photo: Stephanie Berger

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ON WITH THE SHOW

The late filmmaker John Cassavetes directed his wife and muse, the lovely actress Gena Rowlands, in seven films, in his famously intimate, improvisatory way. In their early movies—particularly the raw and underrated “A Child Is Waiting” (1963)—Cassavetes established the theme he would pursue throughout his career: the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the face we wear in private and the face we present to the world. His 1977 film, “Opening Night,” turns on the terrible secret of an actress (Rowlands) and why the show must always go on. From Dec. 2 to Dec. 6, the Flemish director Ivo van Hove brings his stage adaptation of “Opening Night” to BAM. Employing video and a distinctly physical technique, van Hove's work reveals a relationship to actors that is less poetic and real than Cassavetes's, and much more choreographed. Meshing these two directors' distinct styles might make interesting viewing, depending on whether you think cinema and theatre can converge in a shared hall of illusions.

—*Hilton Als*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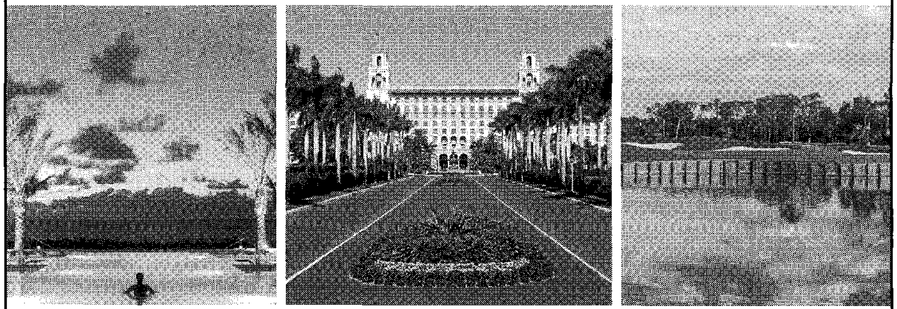

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BARGEMUSIC
Nov. 21-22 at 8: New-music concerts don't get much broader than this—works by the jazz master Chick Corea ("Addendum"), the twelve-tone titan Milton Babbitt, the eclectic neo-Romantic Russell Platt (the New York première of the Sonata for Violin and Piano), and the downtown modernist Harold Meltzer (Donald Barthelme's hilarious "Sinbad," for narrator and piano trio). The able crew includes the violinist Mark Peskanov and the pianist Steven Beck. ♦ Nov. 23 at 4: The violinist Andy Simionescu is featured in a concert offering music by Robert Starer, Brahms (the lyrical Piano Quartet No. 2 in A Major), and Martinů. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

PRISM QUARTET: "MEMO TO SELF"
Among the quirky and intriguing new-music offerings at Symphony Space this week is a concert by the superb saxophone quartet, featuring the world première of Bernard Rands's "Prism" (one of his series of solo "Memo" pieces) along with music by Augusta Read Thomas and Katie Agócs. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Nov. 22 at 7:30.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
In another starry piano-duo concert this week, James Levine and Daniel Barenboim join a group of fine young singers (including the mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke) in both sets of Brahms's "Liebeslieder Walzer," saving Schubert's "Grand Duo" in C Major for themselves. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 23 at 5.)

NEW YORK WOODWIND QUINTET: "ELLIOTT CARTER'S FIRST HUNDRED YEARS"
One of Carter's supreme interpreters, the pianist Ursula Oppens, joins the renowned group for a survey of the Master's music that includes such works as "Esprit Rude/Esprit Doux" and the Quintet for Piano and Winds. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Nov. 23 at 8.)

CAPUÇON-ANGELICH TRIO
The dashing *frères* Capuçon, on violin and cello, join their longtime collaborator, the pianist Nicholas Angelich, in music by Haydn, Shostakovich, and Mendelssohn (the Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Nov. 22 at 8.)

AN DIE MUSIK
John Musto's Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano (with the composer at the keyboard) is a highlight of this appealing ensemble's latest concert, which also features music by Beethoven (including the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major) and Bruce Adolphe. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Nov. 23 at 4.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: TRIO MEDIAEVAL
In "A Worcester Ladymass," the group's three Scandinavian sopranos wend their super-refined sounds around a collection of short sacred works from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England, interspersed with evocative new compositions by Gavin Bryars. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Nov. 23 at 4.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE BETRAYAL
A documentary, directed by Ellen Kuras and Thavisouk Phrasavath, about a family's journey from Laos to New York. In English and Lao. Opening Nov. 21. (IFC Center.)

BOLT
An animated comedy about a dog who believes he's a superhero. With the voice of John Travolta. Directed by Byron Howard and Chris Williams. Opening Nov. 21. (In wide release.)

HARVARD BEATS YALE 29-29
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 19. (Film Forum.)

I CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT
Shamim Sarif directed this romantic drama, about a Palestinian woman who faces her homosexual desires. Opening Nov. 21. (Quad Cinema.)

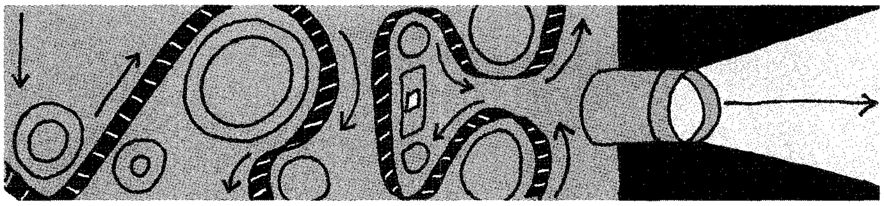
LAKE CITY
A drama, directed by Hunter Hill and Perry Moore, about a drug dealer (Troy Garity) who takes refuge with his mother (Sissy Spacek). Opening Nov. 21. (Quad Cinema.)

SPECIAL
A comic thriller, directed by Hal Haberman and Jeremy Passmore, about a mild-mannered man (Michael Rapaport) who takes part in a drug trial and emerges with supernatural powers. Opening Nov. 21. (Sunshine Cinema.)

TWILIGHT
Catherine Hardwicke directed this adaptation of the young-adult novel by Stephenie Meyer, about a teen-age girl who becomes involved with a vampire. Opening Nov. 21. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

HARVARD BEATS YALE 29-29
Sports may not always be a metaphor for life, but in Kevin Rafferty's refreshingly austere documentary, about a legendary 1968 college football game, it comes off as a surprisingly meaningful part of it. Yale's team was famous, Harvard's unheralded, but both were undefeated when they



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DVD NOTES
BOXED-SET ROUNDUP

"The Films of Budd Boetticher" (Sony)—The Westerns that Boetticher—a hard-nosed man raised on horseback—made for Columbia starring Randolph Scott in the late nineteen-fifties are a stark corrective to triumphalist romanticism. The gaunt, blank-faced Scott takes care of business in the face of constant cruelty and imminent danger. "The Tall T" features Henry Silva as a sneering young cowboy psychopath; "Ride Lonesome" co-stars Lee Van Cleef as a bitter, wounded soul ensnared in an intricate plot of revenge. The extras include a commentary by Martin Scorsese and a documentary portrait of Boetticher that has tributes from Clint Eastwood and Quentin Tarantino.

"The Robert Drew Kennedy Films Collection" (Docurama)—With the White House heralded as Camelot redux, it's timely to look again at the pair of brilliant documentaries, "Primary," from 1960, and "Crisis," from 1963, which were produced by Drew and shot by such great cameramen as Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, and Albert Maysles. They reveal John F. Kennedy's charisma (when he defeated Hubert Humphrey for his Party's nomination) and his political sangfroid (when, as President, he enforced the integration of the University of Alabama).

"Griffith Masterworks 2" (Kino)—Though famous for the aesthetic originality (and infamous for the racism) of "The Birth of a Nation" and admired for the spectacle of "Intolerance," D. W. Griffith created a wide range of masterworks, many on a more intimate scale. This five-disk set includes five of them, among them "Sally of the Sawdust," a comic circus romance that stars W. C. Fields as a carnival magician, and Griffith's only two sound films: "Abraham Lincoln," featuring a magisterial performance by Walter Huston, and the harrowing anti-alcohol cautionary tale "The Struggle."

"Alfred Hitchcock Premiere Collection" (M-G-M)—This self-recommending cornucopia offers eight masterworks, such as "Notorious," "Spellbound," and "Rebecca"; the kinky 1947 courtroom drama "The Paradine Case"; and a fine restoration of "The Lodger," the visually striking and tautly suspenseful silent take on the Jack the Ripper story, from 1926. Extras include archival interviews with the director, by Peter Bogdanovich and François Truffaut.

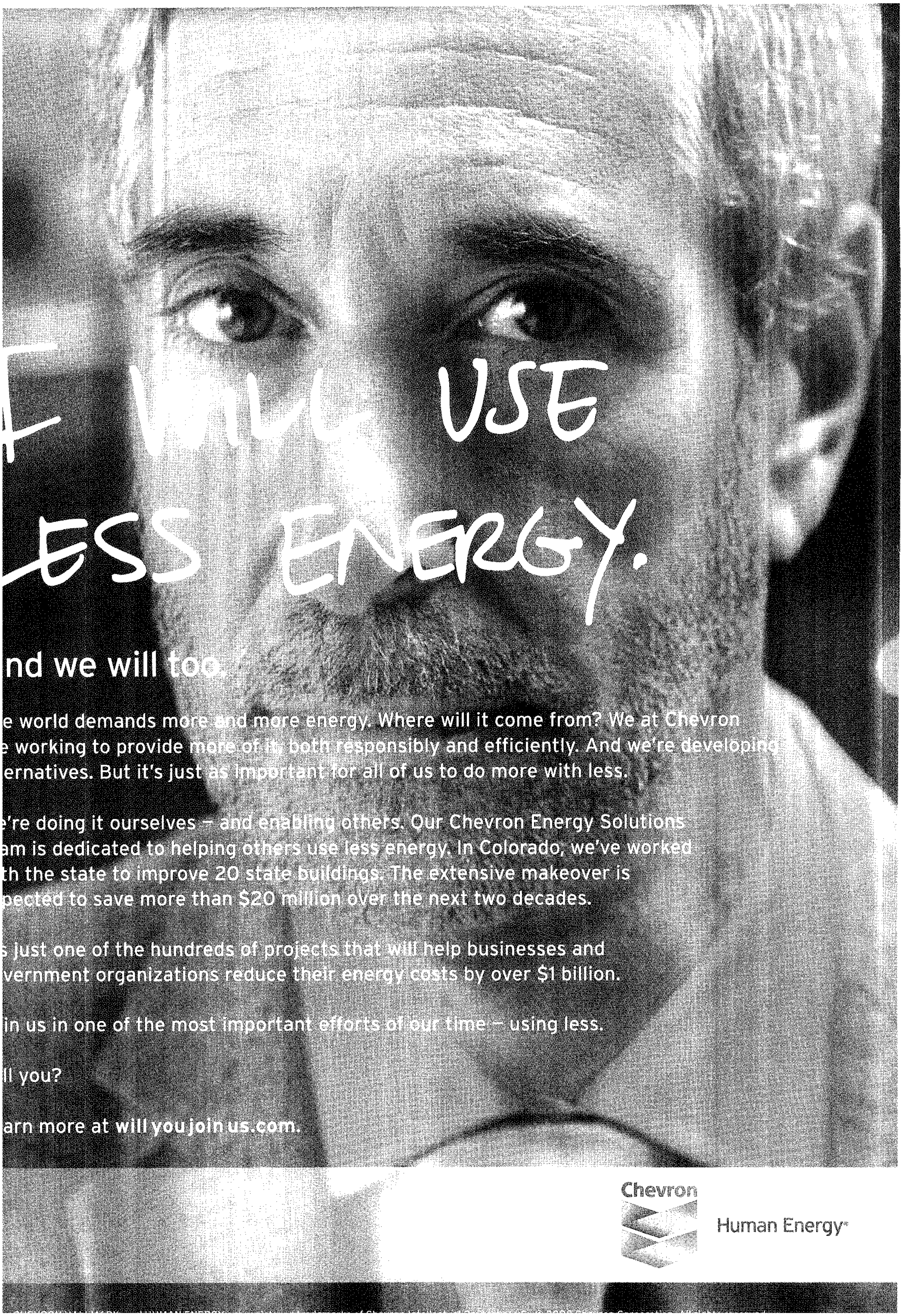
"Hollywood Musicals Collection" (Fox)—The musical genre revels in excess, of which this sixty-one-disk box of fifty acclaimed examples is an apt representative. It offers such Rodgers and Hammerstein classics as "Carousel" and "South Pacific"; Elvis movies ("Love Me Tender" and "Kid Galahad"); auteurist triumphs, including Howard Hawks's "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" and Otto Preminger's "Carmen Jones"; and a number of remarkable rarities, including "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum," a plein-air Depression-age operetta starring Al Jolson, with a score by Rodgers and Hart.

"Kenji Mizoguchi's Fallen Women" (Criterion Eclipse)—The exquisite grace of the great Japanese director's images is balanced by the ferocity of his anger at a culture that, in his view, gives women a choice between domestic subservience and prostitution. This set offers four classics, including the prewar "Sisters of the Gion," about a geisha who sacrifices all for the man she loves; the harrowing, harshly realistic "Women of the Night," in which Mizoguchi crystallizes the physical and moral degradation of postwar Japan; and his last film, "Street of Shame," set in a Tokyo brothel in which a Westernized woman disabuses her colleagues of their dreams.

"Murnau, Borzage, and Fox" (Fox)—In the mid-twenties, the producer William Fox (who already employed such artists as John Ford, Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh, and Frank Borzage) signed the great German director F. W. Murnau, putting virtually limitless resources at his disposal for "Sunrise," a poetic love story for which the director reconstructed a mythic city on a colossal scale. This teeming box offers two versions of that classic, along with Murnau's stark, Freudian "City Girl" and a reconstruction of his lost "4 Devils," as well as ten silents by the moody, romantic Borzage, including a European restoration of his partially lost "The River."

"10 Years of Rialto Pictures" (Criterion)—Film Forum's repertory program director, Bruce Goldstein, got into the business of film restoration and distribution in order to procure prints of movies he wanted to show. This set brings together works that his company, Rialto, has made available, including Robert Bresson's "Au Hasard Balthazar," in which the world's evils converge to torment the title character, a donkey; Jean-Luc Godard's "Band of Outsiders," with its famed dash through the Louvre; and "Army of Shadows," Jean-Pierre Melville's classic drama about the French Resistance.

"Ringside Ali" (Genius Products)—Fans of the sweet science will not be able to tear their eyes from this trove of fifteen bouts (as rebroadcast by ESPN) of the most balletic and poetic of athletes, carrying Muhammad Ali from his early days as Cassius Clay and his stunning upset of Sonny Liston to win the heavyweight title, through his comeback conquest of George Foreman and the apocalyptic "Thrilla in Manila" against Joe Frazier. The matches feature tart commentary from Bert Sugar, the boxers George Chuvalo and Chuck Wepner, and a host of journalists; special attention is paid to Ali's fabled first-round knockout of Liston in the 1965 rematch.



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met in the season's final game, played in Cambridge, which proceeded according to expectations, until the last minute, when Yale blew a 29–13 lead. Rafferty intercuts the original television broadcast of the game (called by Don Gillis) with lively talking-head interviews with many of the game's now-middle-aged participants—including Tommy Lee Jones, a Harvard guard and Al Gore's roommate; Ted Livingston, a Yale tackle and George W. Bush's roommate; and Yale quarterback Brian Dowling, nicknamed God and immortalized as B.D. in Garry Trudeau's "Doonesbury" comics. The story has a hero (Harvard's second-string quarterback, Frank Champi) and a villain (Yale linebacker Mike Bouscaren), and the game's action, which is exciting on its own terms, connects with the personal and public passions of the day, from politics (Harvard's squad included a Vietnam vet and a member of the S.D.S.) to the sexual revolution (the men reminisce about the change in mores that resulted from the Pill). The result is a fascinating feat of cultural archeology.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 3: SENIOR YEAR

For the first time, the goings on at East High, that noted hotbed of voluptuous tension and intellectual clout, are visible on the big screen. Until now, the franchise has stayed within the bounds of the Disney Channel, and this third installment, directed by Kenny Ortega, cleaves to established guidelines. The young scholars still carry books around, for instance, in preference to reading them. Troy (Zac Efron) still loves Gabriella (Vanessa Hudgens) with a passion so unbridled that they are allowed to sit side by side on a hammock. He even invites her up into his tree house. But prom night beckons, as does the prospect of college, not to mention the end-of-year dramatic production: a chance for Chad (Corbin Bleu), Sharpay (Ashley Tisdale), Kelsi (Olesya Rulin), and the other regulars to parade their extravagant gifts. Though the plot feels weirdly scrappy and casual, there is a pleasing generosity to the way in which Ortega crams in as many songs as possible, often on the flimsiest of pretexts; if one tune slips from your memory before the next arrives, that's part of the deal. Much less forgettable is Ryan (Lucas Grabeel), the school choreographer, who dreams of Juilliard and dresses like a Nazi golfer.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/3/08.) (In wide release.)

I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG

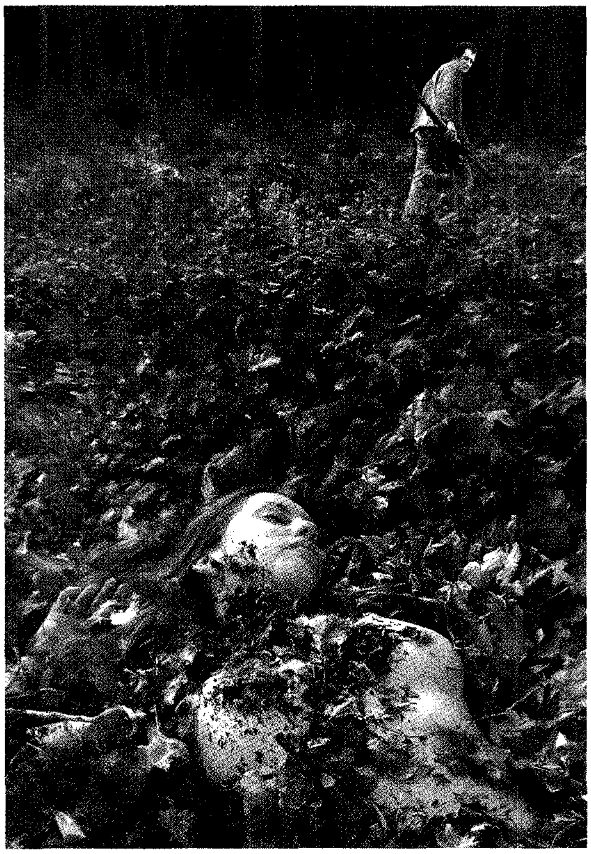
As Juliette, Kristin Scott Thomas is first seen in closeup without makeup, her hair lustreless, her expression blank but tense. Juliette has completed a prison sentence of fifteen years for committing the unimaginable crime of murdering her six-year-old son. Her kid sister, Léa (Elsa Zylberstein), a literature professor at a university in Nancy, nervously lets her into her own family, where Juliette remains in an uneasy state of semi-silence. Written and directed by the novelist Philippe Claudel, the movie asks whether anyone who has done something so extreme can be welcomed back into the human community. And does she *want* to be welcomed back? Claudel is an observant man, he has commanded a large (and to us, unfamiliar) cast of actors to gather around his star, and he dramatizes Juliette's slow reawakening with an infinite number of small, sharply etched details. The secrets that are finally revealed about the crime are unsatisfying—one feels a little cheated—but they have the curious effect of making one want to see the movie again in order to study Scott Thomas's performance. In French.—*David Denby* (11/10/08) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE

The producer Val Lewton specialized in economical and literate horror movies. But on its own small scale, this tensile mood piece from 1943—about love, revenge, and voodoo—is extravagantly lyrical. A riff on Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" that prefigures Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea," it stars Frances Dee as a Canadian nurse who takes a job tending the ambulatory yet mentally dead wife (Christine Gordon) of a West Indian plantation owner (Tom Conway). Lewton's screenwriters, Curt Siodmak and Ardel Wray, knew how to make the occult and the psychological converge, and the director, Jacques Tourneur, a master at orchestrating shadowy and suggestive forms, gave supernatural doings the force of poetic justice.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; Nov. 21-22.)

NOT RECONCILED

The subtitle of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's first feature, from 1965, "Only Violence Helps Where Violence Reigns," suggests the fierce political program evoked by their rigorous aesthetic. The pretext of the film, set in Cologne, is Heinrich Böll's novel "Billiards at Half Past Nine," which they strip down to a handful of stark events and film with a confrontational angularity akin to the Bartók music that adorns the soundtrack. The subtlest of cues accompany the story's complex flashbacks. The middle-aged Robert Fähmel tells a young hotel bellhop of persecutions under the Third Reich; his elderly father, Heinrich, an architect famed for a local abbey, recalls the militarism of the First World War, when his wife, Johanna, incurred trouble for insulting the Kaiser. A third-generation Fähmel is considering architecture, just as the exiled brother of Robert's late wife, returns, only to be met by their former torturer, now a West German official taking part in a celebratory parade of war veterans. Straub and Huillet make the layers of history live in the present tense, which they judge severely. The tamped-down acting and the spare, tense visual rhetoric suggest a state of moral crisis as well as the response—as much in style as in substance—that it demands. In German.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; Nov. 23.)



"Weidmann," by Bachelot Caron, at Cueto Project.

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

The twenty-second James Bond film is a strange affair. The hero is still hopping the globe in the quest to unravel a mysterious organization, as he used to do in the days of SMERSH. The difference, these days, is that none of it, not even the hopping, seems like fun. In the role of 007, Daniel Craig is brutish, joyless, and obsessive; you can't take your eyes off him, but you wonder whether the punishment that he metes out is really directed at himself. He doesn't eat, he drinks to kill pain, and he manages to spend half the movie in the company of the ravishing Camille (Olga Kurylenko) without getting anywhere near a bed. His official mission is to pursue Dominic Greene (Mathieu Amalric), who is—wait for it—fast becoming a leading figure in South American water-storage circles. But the real mission, nurtured in Bond's wounded heart, is to avenge the death of Vesper Lynd, who won his love in "Casino Royale." The director, Marc Forster, whips us from one savage set piece to the next, regardless of logical connection, and the result can be read as the toughest and most expensive art-house film of the year. With Gemma Arterton, who lights up the action, all too briefly, as a fellow British spy.—*A.L.* (11/17/08) (In wide release.)

ROLE MODELS

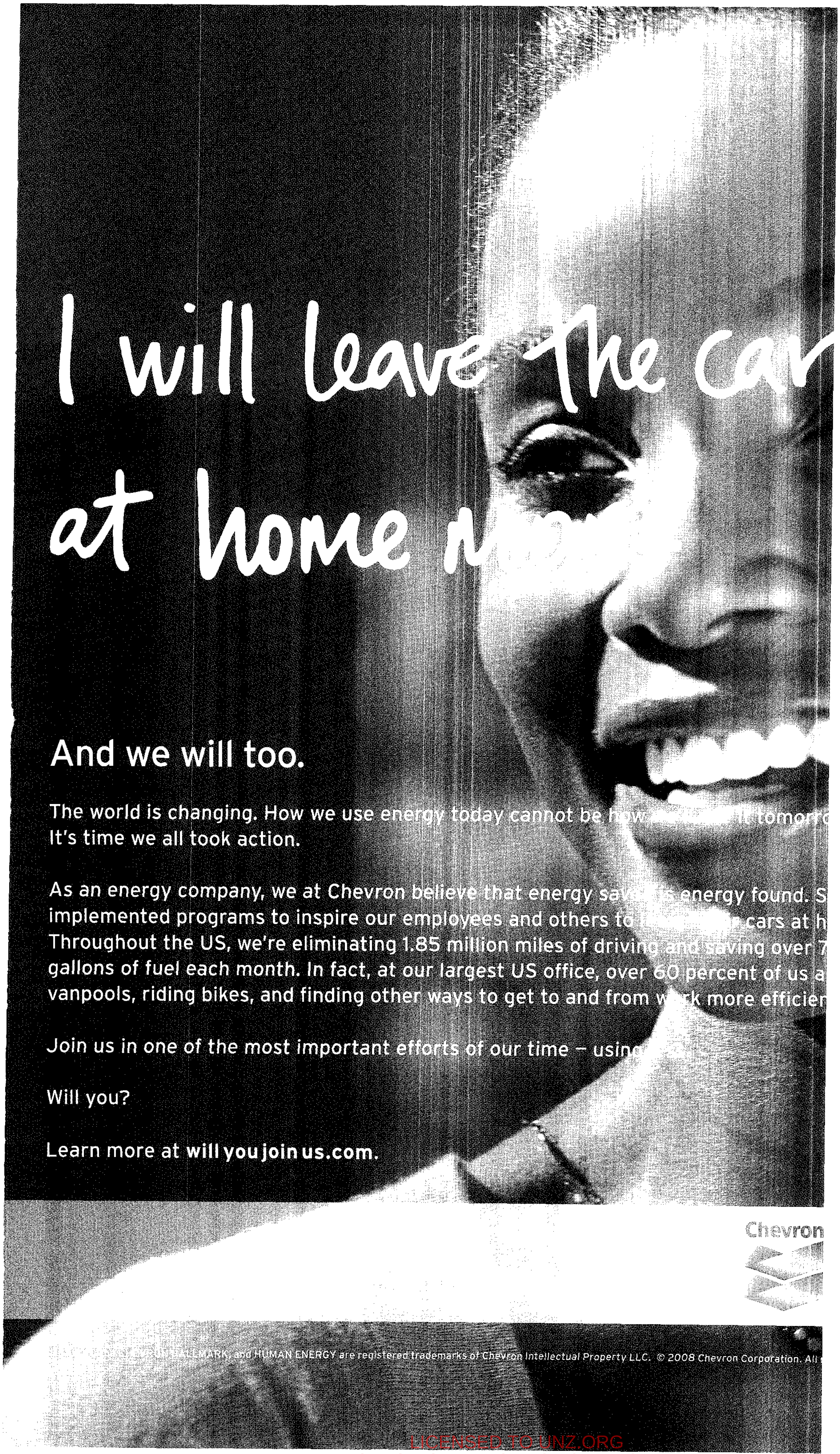
Paul Rudd is mainly the straight man in this wan, sentimental, occasionally very funny comedy. He and Seann William Scott star as a pair of dead-end marketers shilling an energy drink to high-school students. His frustration and anger lead to a run-in with the law that gets them both sentenced to community service with a Big Brothers-like organization—and, not surprisingly, these immature adults ultimately learn to grow up by helping children in need. Most of the comedy comes from a stunning array of supporting comedians from the Judd Apatow stable (especially Christopher Mintz-Plasse, from "Superbad"), who are turned loose and allowed to riff freely, as well as from an outrageous child, Bobb'e J. Thompson, who never becomes cloying. Unfortunately, the humor repeatedly strikes the same few notes and is exhausted long before the warmhearted ending. Poor Elizabeth Banks, as a lawyer and beleaguered fiancée, once again plays a responsible mother surrogate; she and Rudd both need some hard-edged drama to expand their intelligent, lively personae. Directed by David Wain.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK

The screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who was responsible for "Adaptation," "Being John Malkovich," and other enlivening puzzles, has now directed a film of his own. Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Caden Cotard, who starts off running a small theatre company in Schenectady, and, following a sumptuous grant from the MacArthur Foundation, ends up spending decades on an altogether grander project—constructing a chunk of alternative city within New York, in which countless characters go about their scripted lives. It is an amazing conceit, but that, unfortunately, is more or less what it remains: a conceit, which, having taken half the film to get moving, then grows increasingly hard to grasp as a practical enterprise, and even harder to believe in. Figures from Caden's world are represented, within his magnum opus, by hired actors: thus, his colleague Hazel (Samantha Morton), for whom he has an enduring affection, is played by Tammy (Emily Watson), and Caden himself by Sammy (Tom Noonan). As a reflection on the human eagerness to tell tales about ourselves, and to make good on our disappointments through art, Kaufman's movie has fine flashes of black humor, and there is no mistaking the tenderness in the performances of Morton, Watson, and, later on, Dianne Wiest; but the over-all result is a long slog, and the customary brightness of the writer's wit feels ever more clouded by the surrounding gloom. With Catherine Keener, as Caden's weary wife, and Hope Davis, as their counsellor.—*A.L.* (11/3/08) (In wide release.)

ZACK AND MIRI MAKE A PORNO

It begins with church bells ringing in mournful disapproval of the filth that is about to be set before us. Kevin Smith, the eternally blasphemous boy from New Jersey, takes two of his going-nowhere-fast characters—Zack (Seth Rogen) and Miri (Elizabeth Banks), friends since high school and now roommates suffering through the chilly boredom of a Pittsburgh winter—and turns them into porn stars and producers. They assemble a ragtag cast and set to work, after hours, in a Starbucks-like café where Zack is a barista. Alas, the jokes are no more than occasion-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ally funny. As a parodist, Smith doesn't have much room to maneuver. He can only make even sillier the kind of material that, at the plot level, is already hapless—the mailman at the housewife's door, the sudden urge to unzip, the simulated joy. In classic American fashion, the talk is dirtier than the sex. Through it all, Smith attempts to stage a tender love story—Rogen, bearded and then clean-shaven, looks at the lovely Banks like a beatific bull.—*D.D.* (11/10/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

HOW ABOUT YOU: Paris. **MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA:** In wide release. **REPO: THE GENETIC OPERA:** In wide release. **SOUL MEN:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Arthur Penn. Nov. 19 at 7 and Nov. 22 at 4:45: "Bonnie and Clyde" (1967). ♦ Nov. 19 at 9:30 and Nov. 23 at 6:45: "Alice's Restaurant" (1969). ♦ Nov. 20 at 6:45 and Nov. 22 at 9:15: "Little Big Man" (1970). ♦ Nov. 20 at 9:30: "The Miracle Worker" (1962). ♦ Nov. 21 at 9:15: "The Chase" (1966). ♦ Nov. 21 at 7: "Mickey One" (1965). ♦ Nov. 22 at 7: "The Left-Handed Gun" (1958). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Nov. 22 at 4: Short-film program, including "Lovemaking" (1968, Stan Brakhage). ♦ Nov. 23 at 4: "Songs 1-14" (1964-65, Brakhage). ♦ Nov. 23 at 8:30: "Reverberlin" (2006, Michael Snow). ♦ Nov. 24-25 at 7:30: "La Region Centrale" (1971, Snow).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—A tribute to Zeitgeist Films. Nov. 19 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Caravaggio" (1986, Derek Jarman). ♦ "Cinemachat." Nov. 20 at 7:30: "Castle Keep" (1969, Sydney Pollack), followed by a discussion with the critic Elliott Stein. ♦ "Punk 'n' Pie." Nov. 21 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Breaking Glass" (1980, Brian Gibson). ♦ Nov. 22 at 4:45, 7, and 9:30: "24 Hour Party People" (2002, Michael Winterbottom). ♦ Nov. 23 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Reggae in a Babylon" (1978, Wolfgang Buld). ♦ "Pordenone Silent Film Tuesdays." Nov. 25 at 7: "You Never Know Women" (1926, William A. Wellman; silent).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 21-Dec. 2 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "City Lights" (1931, Charles Chaplin). ♦ Nov. 21-Dec. 2 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "Modern Times" (1936, Chaplin). ♦ Through Dec. 2: The films of Carole Lombard. Nov. 21-22 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Twentieth Century" (1934, Howard Hawks). ♦ Nov. 21-22 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "My Man Godfrey" (1936, Gregory La Cava). ♦ Nov. 23 at 1, 4:35, and 8:20: "Hands Across the Table" (1935, Mitchell Leisen). ♦ Nov. 23 at 2:55, 6:30, and 10:15: "True Confession" (1937, Wesley Ruggles). ♦ Nov. 24 at 1, 5:10, and 9:20: "Sinners in the Sun" (1932, Alexander Hall). ♦ Nov. 24 at 2:25, 6:35, and 10:45: "Virtue" (1932, Edward Buzzell). ♦ Nov. 24 at 3:45 and 7:55: "White Woman" (1933, Stuart Walker). ♦ Nov. 25 at 1:20, 4:35, and 7:50: "No Man of Her Own" (1932, Ruggles). ♦ Nov. 25 at 3, 6:15, and 9:30: "Now and Forever" (1934, Henry Hathaway).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"CinémaTuesdays." Nov. 25 at 12:30 and 7: "Model Shop" (1969, Jacques Demy). ♦ Nov. 25 at 4 and 9: "One Sings, the Other Doesn't" (1977, Agnès Varda; in French).

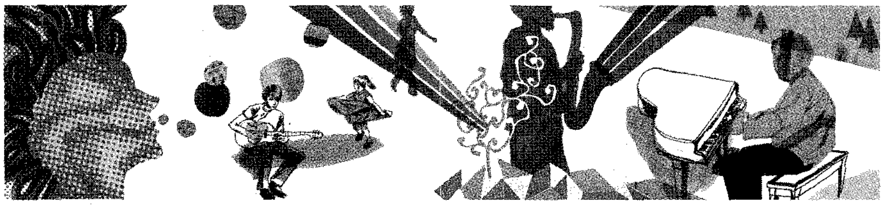
IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The films of Ingmar Bergman. Nov. 21-23 at 11 A.M.: "Monika" (1953; in Swedish). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Nov. 25 at 8: "The Last Cigarette" (1999, Kevin Rafferty and Frank Keraudren), introduced by the directors.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Contenders." Nov. 19 at 8: "Intimidad" (2008, David Redmon and Ashley Sabin; in Spanish and English). ♦ Nov. 20 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 3: "Encounters at the End of the World" (2007, Werner Herzog). ♦ Nov. 23 at 2 and Nov. 24 at 8:30: "The Silence Before Bach" (2007, Pere Portabella; in Spanish and German). ♦ "Best Film Not Playing at a Theatre Near You." Nov. 20 at 6 and Nov. 22 at 3: "Sita Sings the Blues" (2008, Nina Paley). ♦ Nov. 20 at 8 and Nov. 22 at 6: "Wellness" (2008, Jake Mahaffy). ♦ Nov. 21 at 6 and Nov. 23 at 1:30: "The New Year Parade" (2008, Tom Quinn). ♦ Nov. 21 at 8:15 and Nov. 23 at 5:30: "Afterschool" (2008, Antonio Campos). ♦ Nov. 22 at 8:15 and Nov. 23 at 3:45: "Meadowlark" (2008, Taylor Greeson).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria 718-784-0077)—Special event. Nov. 22 at 7: Jerry Lewis, in conversation with Peter Bogdanovich. The event will take place at the Times Center, 242 W. 41st St.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 21 at 9:30: "Ali: Fear Eats the Soul" (1974, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German), introduced by the director Pia Frankenberg.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Manny Farber: 1917-2008." Nov. 19 at 1:30: "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" (1967, Jean-Luc Godard;



NICK LU

MUSIC NOTES
CD BOXED SETS

"Atlantic Vocal Groups 1951-1963" (Atlantic)—American popular music in the fifties was a stew of jazz, jump blues, and close-harmony groups; by the middle of the decade, rock and roll had taken hold. This four-disk set lovingly illustrates the transition through the era's vocal groups—the Clovers, the Drifters, the Regals, the Penguins. The music is superb, with disks divided into the up-tempo numbers and dreamy ballads that spawned rock and roll, and material from the vocal-group revival of the early sixties.

Johnny Cash, "Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison (The Legacy Edition)" (Columbia/Legacy)—In January of 1968, Johnny Cash played a pair of shows at Folsom State Prison in Northern California, solidifying his outlaw image while delivering a spectacular set of crime-and-punishment-themed country music. The album, offering selections from those performances, has never been out of print, but this fortieth-anniversary set includes both concerts in their entirety, plus a documentary DVD.

Benny Goodman, "Classic Columbia Orchestra Sessions (1939-1958)" (Mosaic)—Goodman's stint with Columbia Records wasn't what made him the King of Swing, but it was among his most creative work. Concentrating mainly on instrumentals, which reaffirm Goodman's fabled virtuosity on the clarinet, this seven-disk set also reacquaints listeners with the innovative work of the overlooked arranger Eddie Sauter.

"Hommage à Nesuhi" (Rhino Handmade)—The late record executive Nesuhi Ertegün may not have possessed the celebrity of his younger brother, Ahmet, but his visionary production work for Atlantic Records with John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Charles Mingus, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Ray Charles, Hank Crawford, and others made him a behind-the-scenes legend. This five-disk tribute was the last project completed by Joel Dorn, the producer who followed Ertegün at Atlantic and who died late last year.

The Jesus and Mary Chain, "The Power of Negative Thinking: B-Sides and Rarities" (Blanco Y Negro/Rhino)—The Jesus and Mary Chain opened up their career with a blast: the epochal fuzzed-out album "Psychocandy," in 1985. For more than a decade, William and Jim Reid continued to make like gothic Everly Brothers, combining intense feedback and an equally intense love of early rock. This box collects stray singles, soundtrack contributions, and demos, and, while four disks may be more than most fans need, the set delivers a surprisingly satisfying and cohesive portrait of the band.

"Love Train: The Sound of Philadelphia" (Philadelphia International/Legacy)—In the early seventies, commercial soul music moved away from its twin bases in Detroit (Motown) and Memphis (Stax) and ended up in Philadelphia, in the prolific and sometimes transcendent songwriting hands of Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff. Gamble and Huff, along with the producer Thom Bell and a stable of performers that included the O'Jays, Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, the Spinners, and Billy Paul, delivered a stream of hits that bridged the gap between the sixties and disco. While some of the earliest hits, like "Expressway (To Your Heart)," are more generic, Philly soul soon came to specialize in intensely romantic music—the Delfonics, the Stylistics, and lesser-known groups like the Ebonys—and upmarket protest soul. The box set has a wealth of essays and interviews, though no song-by-song annotation.

Charlie Parker, "Bird in Time: 1940-1947" (ESP-Disk)—This astonishing set, produced by Michael D. Anderson, collects the seminal jazz modernist's rare, revelatory earliest recordings, such as radio-station transcriptions of Parker with the raucous Jay McShann band, acetates cut privately in a Chicago hotel room, and an intimate trio session, from 1942, in which Parker seems to be present beside a solitary listener at home. The set also includes high-flying live dates featuring the saxophonist with Dizzy Gillespie and Lennie Tristano, as well as archival interviews with Parker himself and fascinating recent ones, realized by Anderson for his radio broadcasts, with musicians from Parker's circle, including the strikingly candid Earl Coleman and Roy Porter.

Nina Simone, "To Be Free: The Nina Simone Story" (Legacy)—Nina Simone's output was divided across so many labels and so many styles that it has always been difficult to summarize. This set tries and largely succeeds. Starting with her relatively straight jazz from the late fifties and early sixties, the three CDs document her move into protest and pop music. Most of her canon is represented here, including the powerful "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" and covers of songs like the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun" and Randy Newman's "Baltimore." (Inexplicably, there's no "Sinnerman.") What the set proves repeatedly is that she was an iron-fisted interpreter; once a song got close to her, it rarely got away.

Hank Williams, "The Unreleased Recordings" (Time Life)—In 1951, Hank Williams and his band performed live on the Nashville radio program "Mother's Best Flour." These fifty-four cuts from the show, which were rescued from a garbage bin, show that Williams was a veritable human jukebox. Irish ballads, forgotten spirituals, and sea shanties offset Williams' cracked-heart laments, as though he sought refuge in the music of past centuries, even when hawking cornmeal.

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in French). ♦ Nov. 19 at 3:30: "Walkabout" (1971, Nicolas Roeg). ♦ Nov. 20 at 1 and Nov. 22 at 4:40: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Nov. 20 at 3:15: "Christmas in July" (1940, Preston Sturges). ♦ Nov. 20 at 4:45: "Mouchette" (1967, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ Nov. 21 at 1 and Nov. 23 at 4:45: "His Girl Friday" (1940, Howard Hawks). ♦ Nov. 21 at 3 and Nov. 22 at 9: "I Walked with a Zombie" (†). ♦ Nov. 22 at 7, Nov. 23 at 8:45, and Nov. 25 at 2: "Scarface" (1932, Hawks). ♦ Nov. 23 at 1: "I Was Born, But . . ." (1932, Yasujiro Ozu; silent). ♦ Nov. 23 at 3: "Not Reconciled" (†). ♦ Nov. 23 at 6:45 and Nov. 25 at 4: "The Lineup" (1958, Don Siegel). ♦ A tribute to Frank Sinatra. Nov. 19 at 8:30: "Some Came Running" (1958, Vincente Minnelli), introduced by Adrian Wootton. ♦ "Golden Silents." Nov. 21 at 7: "The Docks of New York" (1928, Joseph von Sternberg; silent). ♦ A Tribute to Pierre Clémenti. Nov. 25 at 6:15: "Les Idoles" (1968, Marc'o; in French).

READINGS AND TALKS

MCNALLY JACKSON BOOKS
The sixties vets Ed McClanhan, the author of the newly published autobiographical short-story collection "O the Clear Moment," and the novelist Robert Stone take a look back at the consequential decade. (52 Prince St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 19 at 7.)

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
The poet and memoirist Mark Doty reads from his work. (Graduate Center, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 20 at 7.)

BARNES & NOBLE
The actor Christopher Plummer offers selections from his memoir, "In Spite of Myself." (Broadway at 66th St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 21 at 7:30.)

SOLAS
St. Mark's Bookshop runs a reading series at this watering hole, which is just around the corner from its East Village home. On Nov. 24 at 7:30, it presents the novelist Junot Díaz and the science-fiction master Samuel R. Delany. (232 E. 9th St. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

ON THIN ICE
The American Museum of Natural History is opening a skating rink outside its doors on Nov. 22. The rink, which is a hundred and fifty feet by eighty feet, can accommodate up to two hundred people; at its center is a seventeen-foot-tall polar bear made of stainless steel, boxwood boughs, and lights. But what really makes the rink special is its surface: instead of ice, it's made of a special global-warming-proof plastic. (Central Park W. at 79th St. For more information, call 212-769-5200. Through Feb. 28.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
With the two-week Impressionist-modern-postwar-contemporary smackdown over and done, the auction houses settle back into their new everyday business—trying to sell expensive works of art in the midst of a bear market. This week, that means works by Latin-American masters. The painter Rufino Tamayo, who ably combined elements of Cubism and Surrealism with Mexican themes and a keen sense of color, is represented by six works in **Sotheby's** Latin-American sales (Nov. 18-19). The most important is a monumental canvas from 1955, "America," which for the past fifteen years has been on view at the Dallas Museum of Art. The Tamayos will share the podium with works by the Uruguayan-born modernist Joaquín Torres-García and his followers (known as the School of the South) and by several female Surrealist painters, including Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** Latin-American sale (Nov. 19-20) also features a smattering of Tamayos, the most highly valued of which, "Serenata a la Luna," depicts a solitary figure serenading the glowing night sky with a guitar. But the leading lot in this sale—which also includes works by Carrington, Matta, and the Argentinean artist Emilio Pettoruti—is by Torres-García, a stained-glass-like composition entitled "Tres Figuras." A few days later, the house shows a more playful side in a pop-culture sale devoted to punk and rock-and-roll items and designer toys (Nov. 24); fans can bid on one of Bob Marley's guitars or on the portable organ played by John Lennon at Shea Stadium in 1965, as well as vintage posters and flyers for the Ramones and the Clash. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ For its upcoming auction of modern and contemporary editions (Nov. 23), **Phillips** has gone all out, printing a special catalogue helpfully entitled "Collect This Catalogue," which includes four original prints by the artists Hilary Harkness, James Hyde, William Pope.L, and Kay Rosen. The sale itself contains some striking pieces, including two lithographs by Jean Dubuffet from his "Assemblages" as well as the whimsical engraving "Score for Ballet 0–100" by Alexander Calder. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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PUNY

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
COLD TURKEY
Nov. 28–30

As a welcome corrective to Thanksgiving-weekend sentimentality, Walter Reade presents three days of rain on your parade, with the series "Problem Child: A Cinematic Display of Bad Behavior." The program includes such bilious classics as "The Exorcist," "The Fury," "Mommie Dearest," and the rare "Tomorrow, the World!," from 1944, about a teen-age Nazi in an American college town. (212-875-5600.)

ART
TESTING HIS METAL
Dec. 9–March 1

Alexander Calder is best known for his mobiles, but he was a prolific jewelry maker as well. A hundred or so whimsical brass, silver, and gold pieces—some set with beach glass or found bits of wood in lieu of gems—will be exhibited at the Met in "Calder Jewelry." (212-535-7710.)

NIGHT LIFE
TIN MAN
Dec. 9–18

Ten years ago, Howard Fishman, a local singer and songwriter whose interests range from swinging small-group jazz to Bob Dylan's "Basement Tapes," made his début at the Algonquin Hotel's famed Oak Room. In celebration of that anniversary, he's appearing there and at many other clubs in Brooklyn and Manhattan. (www.howardfishman.com.)

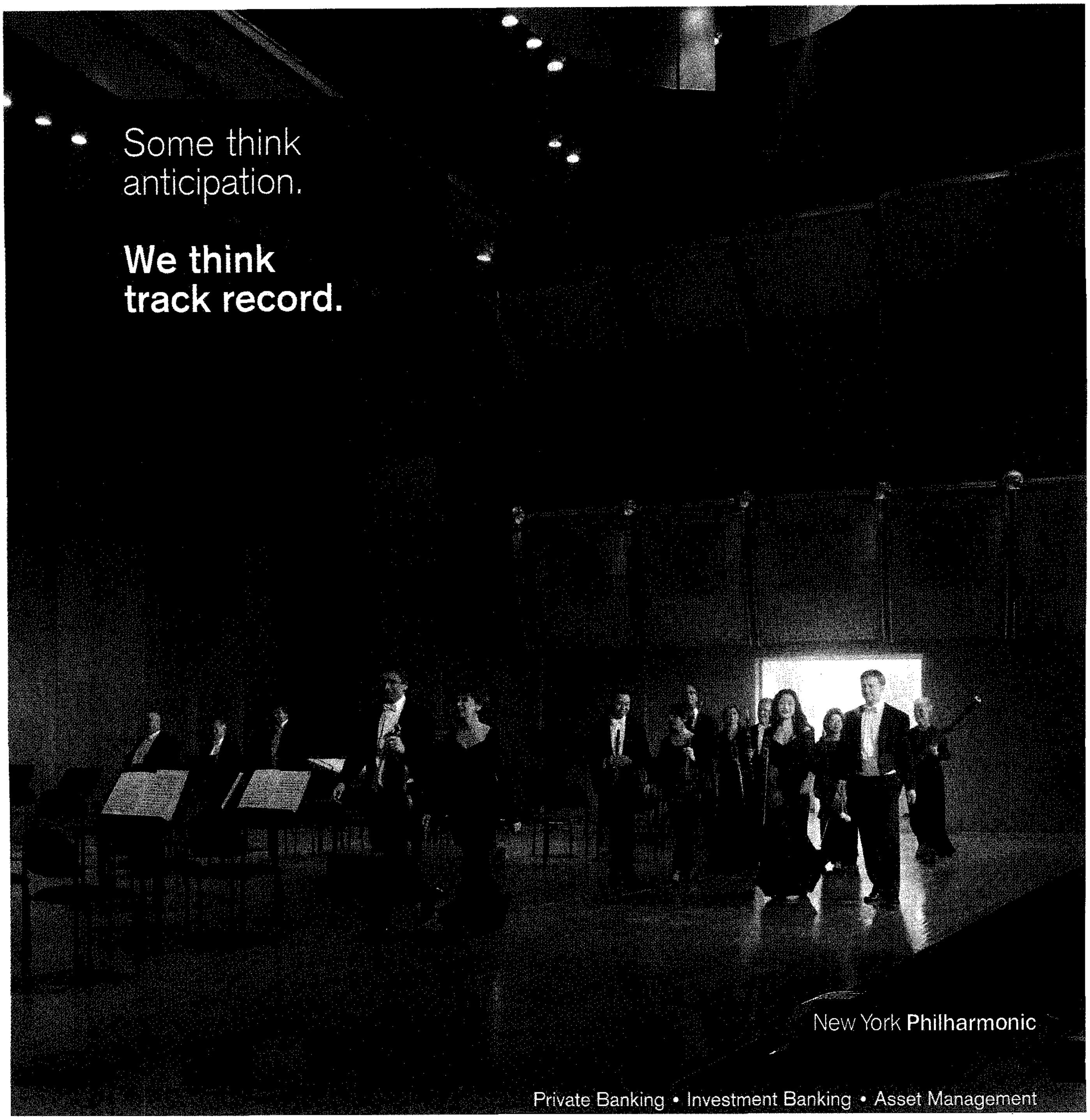
CLASSICAL MUSIC
STRIKING TWICE
Dec. 9, Dec. 11–13

When the Bang On a Can composer Michael Gordon and the visual wizards of Ridge Theatre got together in Brooklyn in 2004, the result was the thrilling musical film "Decasia"; now they offer "Lightning at Our Feet," a song cycle inspired by Emily Dickinson, at the BAM Harvey Theatre. (718-636-4100.)

THE THEATRE
DATE NIGHT
Dec. 16

Gina Gionfriddo's new comedy, "Becky Shaw," comes to Second Stage. Peter DuBois directs the play, in which a newlywed couple try their hand at matchmaking. (212-246-4422.)

"Lightning at Our Feet," at the BAM Harvey Theatre.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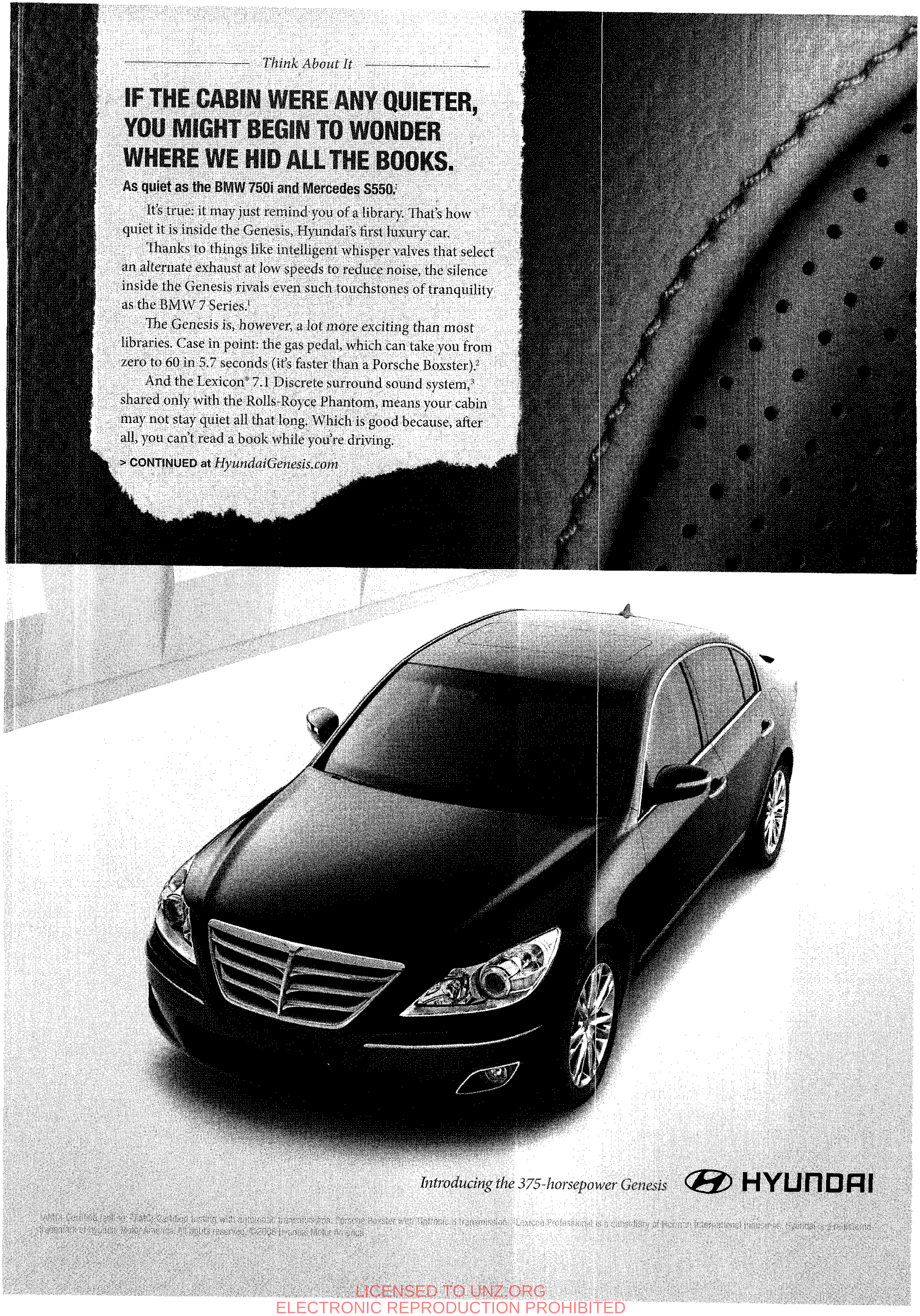

Think About It

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Thanks to things like intelligent whisper valves that select an alternate exhaust at low speeds to reduce noise, the silence inside the Genesis rivals even such touchstones of tranquility as the BMW 7 Series.[1]

The Genesis is, however, a lot more exciting than most libraries. Case in point: the gas pedal, which can take you from zero to 60 in 5.7 seconds (it's faster than a Porsche Boxster).[2]

And the Lexicon® 7.1 Discrete surround sound system,[3] shared only with the Rolls-Royce Phantom, means your cabin may not stay quiet all that long. Which is good because, after all, you can't read a book while you're driving.

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THE NEW YORKER

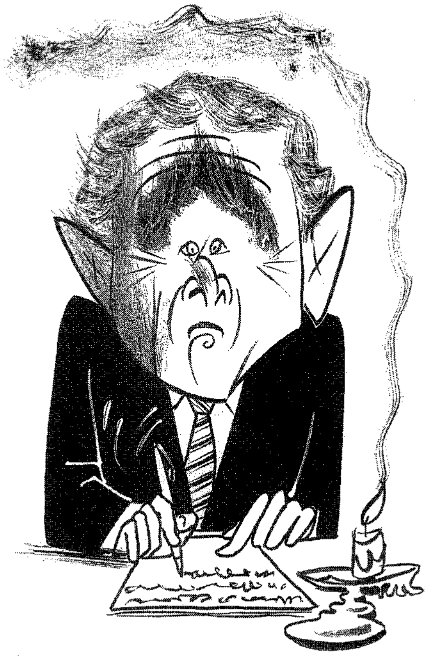
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MIDNIGHT HOUR

When President Jimmy Carter lost his bid for reëlection, in November, 1980, he had lots of unfinished business that he did not intend to leave that way. Carter's Administration spent the next several weeks generating regulations at an unprecedented rate, until, in its last month in office, it published more than ten thousand pages of new rules. These rules, which, like most issued by federal agencies, needed no congressional approval, touched on everything from crash tests for cars to access to medical records, and a phrase was coined to describe them. They became known as "midnight regulations," after the "midnight judges" appointed by John Adams in the final hours of his Presidency.

Since Jimmy Carter, every President has complained about midnight regulations and, four or eight years later, every President has issued them. On a percentage basis, George Bush senior holds the record: his Administration issued a greater proportion of its rules during the midnight period—generally defined as the last three months in office—than any other President's. In absolute terms, though, Bill Clinton takes the gold: his Administration, during its midnight phase, published more than twenty-six thousand pages' worth of rules in the *Federal Register*. (According to the *National Journal*, by the time Clinton left office "the journalists who cover the White House had thrown up their hands at the prospect of keeping up.") President George W. Bush used the timing of these regulations as a rationale for suspending many of them. "I told people pretty plainly that I was going to review all the last-minute decisions that my predecessor had made, and that is exactly what we're doing," he declared.

Now, of course, Bush has entered into his own midnight period, and it promises to be a dark time indeed. Among the many new regulations—or, rather, deregulations—the Administration has proposed are rules that would: make it harder for the government to limit workers' exposure to toxins, eliminate environmental review from decisions affecting fisheries, and ease restrictions on companies that blow up mountains to get at the coal underneath them. Other midnight regulations in the works include rules to allow "factory farms" to ignore the Clean Water Act, rules making it tougher for employees to take family or medical leave, and rules that would effectively gut the Endangered Species Act. Most regulations are subject to public input; such is the sense of urgency that the Administration has brought to the task of despoliation that the Interior Department completed its "review" of two hundred thousand public comments on the endangered-species rules in just four days, a feat that, one congressional aide calculated, required each staff member involved to read through comments at the rate of seven per minute. "So little time, so much damage" is how the *Times* recently put it.



Why do Presidents wait till the last moment to push through changes they've had the power to impose all along? Legal scholars have advanced a variety of explanations; these range from megalomania (each Administration tries to extend its influence into the next) to simple distraction (federal agencies, like ninth graders, have a hard time focussing until they're up against a deadline). Under the best of circumstances,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

experts point out, rule-making is a laborious process; many of the regulations published toward the end of the Clinton Administration—such as a rule limiting the amount of arsenic allowed in public drinking water—had been the subject of years' worth of hearings and scientific review.

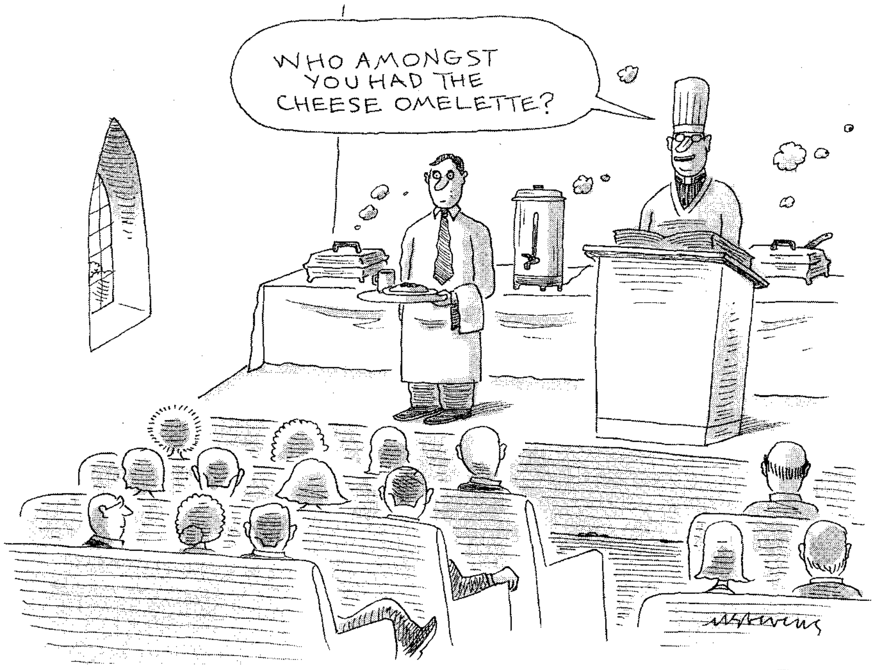
But none of these explanations is adequate to the current situation. What distinguishes this Administration in its final days—as in its earlier ones—is the purity of its cynicism. White House officials haven't even bothered to argue that these new rules are in the public interest. Such a claim would, in any event, be impossible to defend, as just about every midnight regulation being proposed is, evidently, a gift to a favored industry.

Consider, for example, the case of New Source Review. Utility companies have always hated this provision of the Clean Air Act, which requires them to install up-to-date pollution controls when they build new plants or renovate old ones. A new rule being circulated would take a trick that the power company Duke Energy dreamed up for circumventing New Source Review and turn it into law. According to the Administration's own estimates, this new anti-rule would allow an additional seventy million tons of CO_2 to be released into the atmosphere each year. "If you thought the first hundred days of the Bush Administration were bad, just wait and see what the last hundred could bring," Representative Edward Markey, of Massachusetts, has warned.

Democratic leaders in the House and the Senate have already indicated that they will try to rescind the most egregious of Bush's midnight regulations. There are a few ways to do this, all of them difficult. Under an obscure law passed in 1996, Congress has the power to revoke recently imposed rules. That law, though, has been used successfully only once. (President Bush, for all his grumbling—and despite Republican control of Congress for much of his tenure—ended up implementing more than three-quarters of the midnight rules that Clinton had left him, including the one on arsenic, just as they were written.) Alternatively, once in office, Barack Obama could ask his agencies to go through the rule-making process all over again. But, by the time that was finished, a good deal of the damage might already have been done. Once a power plant has been rebuilt, it can't readily be unrebuilt.

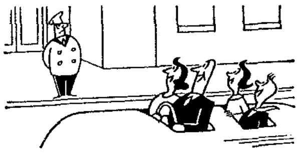
The Bush Administration, probably as a result of its own experience, is now trying to craft rules that are as difficult as possible to reverse. Generally speaking, major federal regulations go into effect sixty days after they are published. On November 20th, it will be sixty days before Bush leaves office. Over at the *Federal Register*, it's going to be a busy week.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*


WHO AMONGST YOU HAD THE CHEESE OMELETTE?

SUNDAY-MORNING PRAYER BREAKFAST

FIRST MOVING DAY
RELATIONS

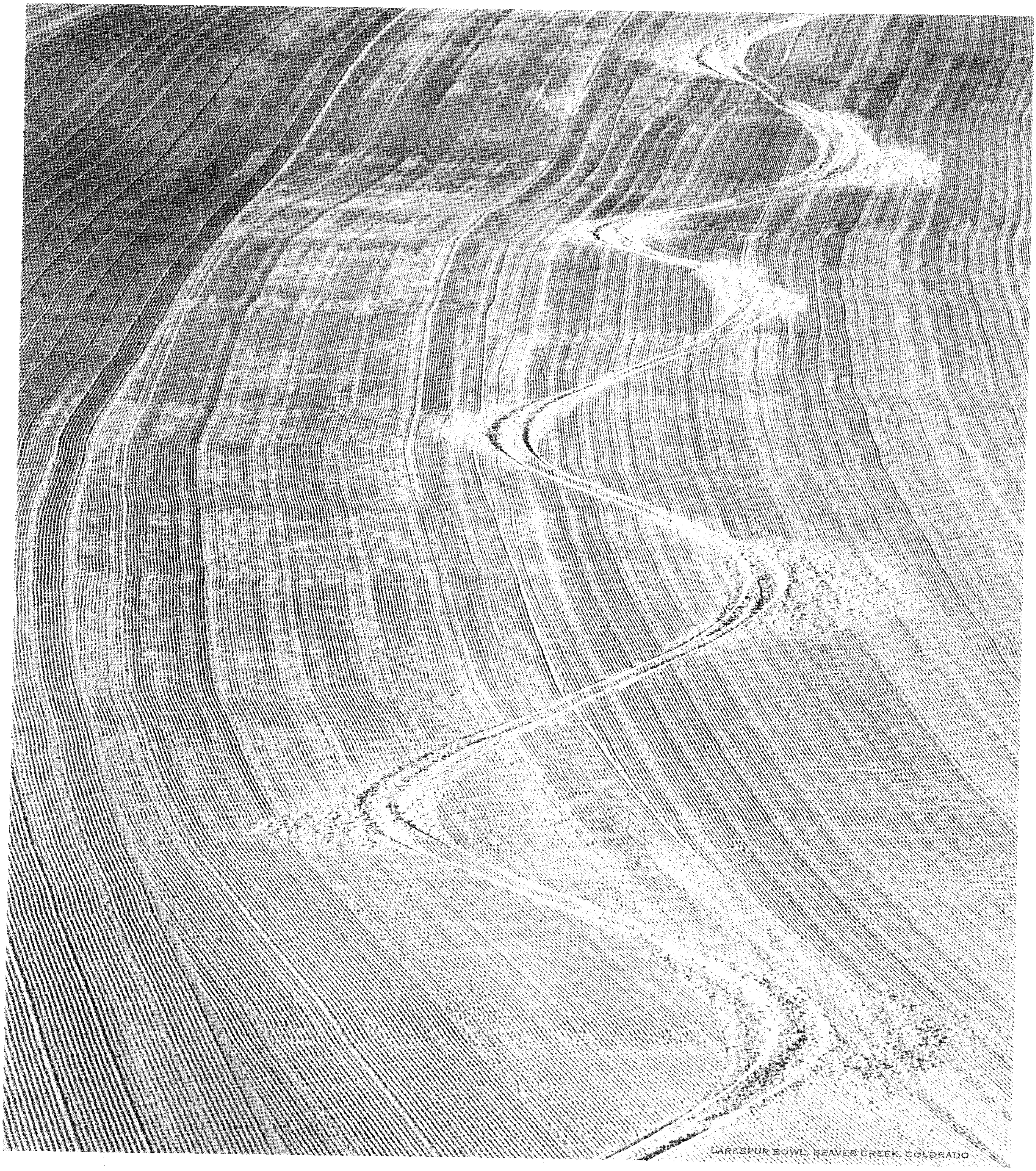


After months of open-air rallies and stadium speeches, America's political families turned last week to domestic scenery: Sarah Palin in her Wasilla kitchen, mixing baby formula; Michelle Obama discussing with Laura Bush which bedrooms at the White House would be good for Malia and Sasha. The Obamas announced that they would be joined in Washington by Michelle's mother, Marian Robinson, who immediately became known as the First Granny. With a little license, one could imagine the clan as a Presidential version of the Griswolds, loading up the Prius, pilin' in the relations, and roadtripping it to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue with the new family mutt.

"I enjoy decorating. So I get to get this whole new room and do whatever I want!" Malia, who is ten, told a reporter, over the summer, and, so, some previous tenants agreed to share a few tips. "The challenge is to make it your home," Luci Baines Johnson said. "It's the people's house, and it's very much a museum. And, in fact, our 'living room' was the West Hall. It didn't even have a door on it! Which is very symbolically appropriate, because your life is so open to the world."

For Johnson and her sister, Lynda Johnson Robb, a memorable perk of living in "the Great White Jail"—as Margaret Truman called it—was the proximity it provided to their father. "It might have been eleven o'clock at night, but he was home for dinner," Robb said. Johnson recalled, "I was on what we called Daddy Duty the day that the 1965 Voting Rights Act was signed into law. I was a narcissistic teen-ager, and I said, 'Oh my God, why are we having to walk over to the Capitol, Daddy?' and he said, 'Darling, because of this great day, the Congress of

Who's CARVING THIS THANKSGIVING?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the United States will never look the same again.'" Young Tad Lincoln, a hellion remembered for kicking balls into mirrors, enjoyed reviewing troop movements with his father. Almost every afternoon, Teddy Roosevelt would join his son Quentin in the attic for a game of "chase the President." (Presumably, before 1998, that sounded like a family activity.)

The generations of girls who have inhabited the White House compose a sort of underground society, initiating one another into the place's charms—"Have a helluva good time," Alice Roosevelt Longworth wrote to Susan Ford. The Johnson sisters planted notes for Tricia and Julie Nixon, especially in the solarium. "Lynda and I had courted there, so we just wished them some precious moments," Johnson said. "Luci and I were of the age to be entertaining dates, and, of course, you didn't particularly care to be discovered by your father," Robb recalled. "When one of us saw him, we would try to message ahead that he was coming your way. We would go up the back staircase, figuring we might be able to get there quicker than Daddy could on the elevator."

Mothers-in-law, historically, have also had ways of making the White House their own. Elvira Doud, the redoubtable mother of Mamie Eisenhower—she "wintered" at the White House—was in the habit of telephoning her daughter from bed ("This is a long-distance call from Mother!"), while Harry Truman's live-in mother-in-law, Madge Wallace, referred to him as a "dirt farmer" and harped on his table manners. An equally influential, but more congenial, grandmotherly boarder was Jimmy Carter's mother, Miz Lillian. A "Saturday Night Live" sketch from the time had her breezing into the Presidential bedroom: "Yoo-hoo! Am I interrupting anything interesting?" Doug Wead, the author of "All the Presidents' Children," pointed out that the extended families of First Ladies have long had the run of the place—Louisa Catherine Adams, he said, brought in a niece who seduced all three Adams sons, and "some nephews who kept bedding the maids."

Tipper Gore's mother, Margaret Aitcheson—Ahnya to her grandkids—was a spicy presence in the pool house of the Naval Observatory, where she lived, with her cat, while Al Gore was Vice-President. (There has been talk about the Bidens moving in Joe's ninety-one-year-old mother.) "Ahnya and I would commiserate about how surreal it was to live in this compound," Kristin Gore recalled. "One day, there was a deer from Rock Creek Parkway in the yard, and when it tried to jump back over it got impaled on the fence. I remember Ahnya looking at me and saying, 'Well, that's just perfect. I hope I get out of here alive.'"

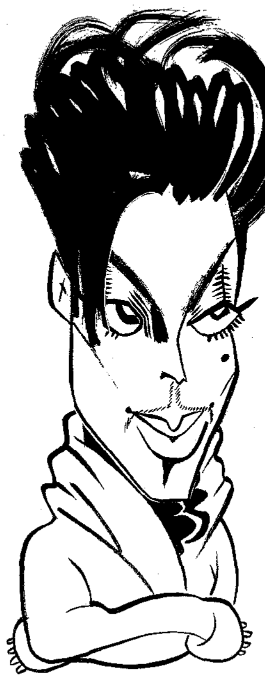
Stephen Berry, an assistant professor of history at the University of Georgia, and the author of "House of Abraham: Lincoln & the Todds, A Family Divided by War," suggested that Barack Obama is "unfamillied in the same way that Lincoln was," and, therefore, is similarly dependent on his in-laws. "What Lincoln was so fantastic at was seeing the Todds as a metaphor," Berry said. "They caused him no end of grief and deep pain"—"100 Todds and all wanting office," newspapers proclaimed—"but then he took all that and sort of transformed them into this metaphor of the nation as a family. And that's certainly what Obama's doing now: 'We're a family in the sense that we're all in this together.'"

—Lauren Collins

HOME VISIT
SOUP WITH PRINCE

The thirty-thousand-square-foot Italianate villa, built this century by Vanna White's ex-husband, looks like many of the other houses in Beverly Park, a gated community in L.A., except for the bright-purple carpet that spills down the front steps to announce its new tenant: Prince. One afternoon just before the election, Prince invited a visitor over. Inside, the place was done up in a generic Mediterranean style, although there were personal flourishes here and there—a Lucite grand piano with a gold-colored "Artist Formerly Known as Prince" symbol suspended over it, purple paisley pillows on a couch. Candles scented the air, and New Age music played in the living room, where a TV screen showed images of bearded men playing flutes. Prince padded into the kitchen, a small fifty-year-old man in yoga pants and a big sweater, wearing platform flip-flops over white socks, like a geisha.

"Would you like something to eat?" he asked, sidling up to the counter. Prince's voice was surprisingly deep, like that of a much larger man. He picked up a copy of "21 Nights," a glossy volume of photographs that he had just released. It is his first published book, a collection of highly stylized photographs of him taken during a series of gigs in London last year. "I'm really proud of this," he said. Short original poems and a CD accompany the photographs. (Sample verse: "Who eye really am only time will tell/ 2 the almighty life 4ce that grows stronger with every chorus/ Yes give praise, lest ye b among . . . the guilty ones.")



Prince

Limping slightly, Prince set off on a walk around his new bachelor pad. Glass doors opened onto acres of back yard, and a hot tub bubbled in the sunlight. "I have a lot of parties," he explained. In the living room, he'd installed purple thrones on either side of a fireplace, and, nearby, along a hallway, he had hung photographs of himself, in a Moroccan villa, in various states of undress. At the end of the hall, a gauzy curtain fluttered in a doorway. "My room," he said. "It's private."

Prince has lived in Los Angeles since last spring, after spending years in Minneapolis, holding court in a complex called Paisley Park, where he made thousands of

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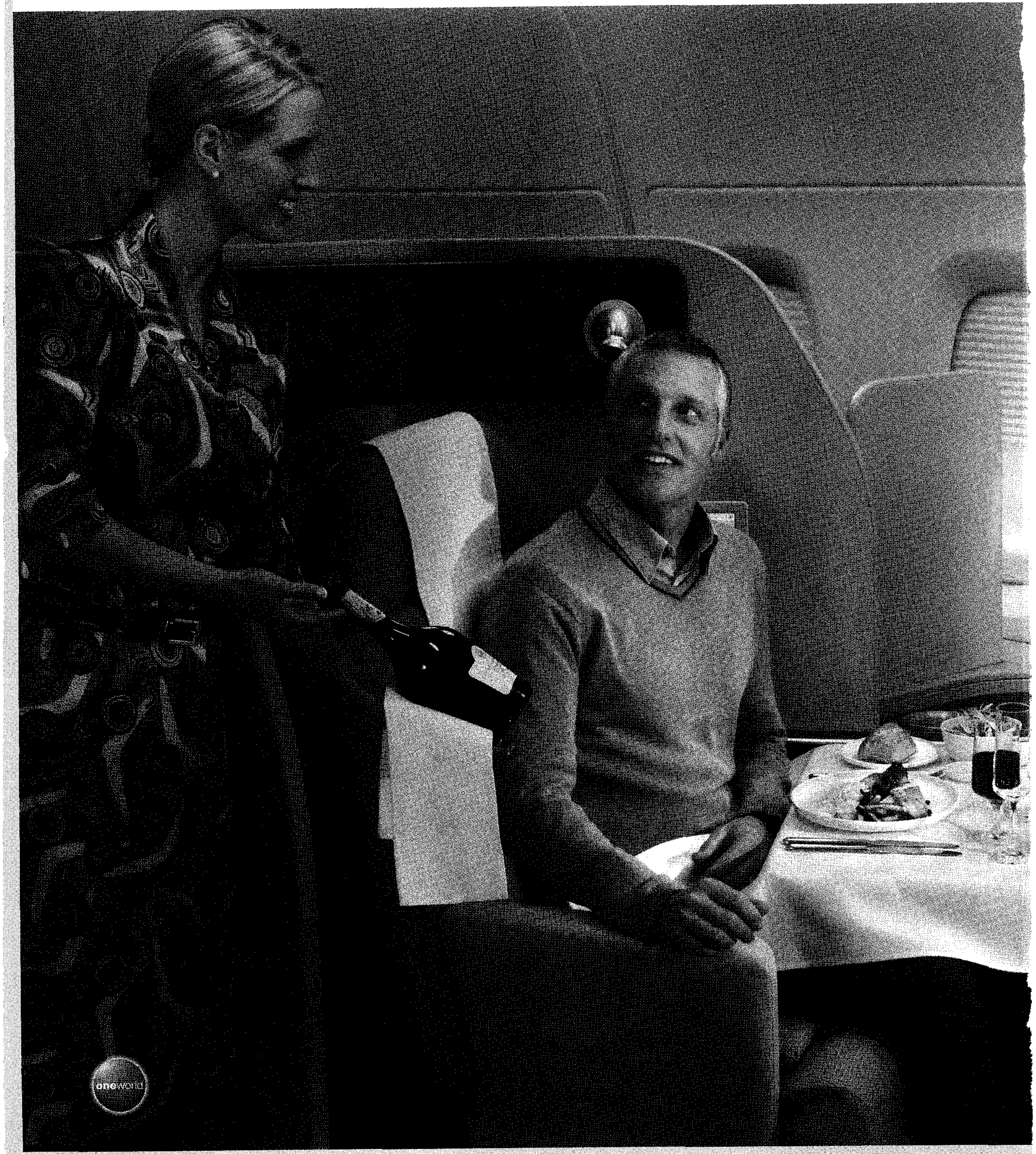

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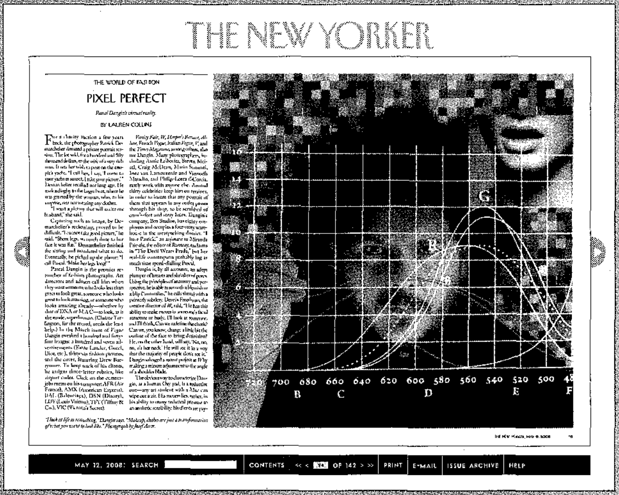

THE NEW YORKER

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BY LAUREN COLLINS

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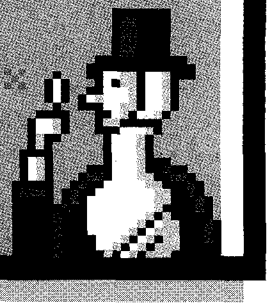


songs, far away from the big labels. Seven years ago, he became a Jehovah's Witness. He said that he had moved to L.A. so that he could understand the hearts and minds of the music moguls. "I wanted to be around people, connected to people, for work," he said. "You know, it's all about religion. That's what unites people here. They all have the same religion, so I wanted to sit down with them, to understand the way they see things, how they read Scripture."

Prince had his change of faith, he said, after a two-year-long debate with a musician friend, Larry Graham. "I don't see it really as a conversion," he said. "More, you know, it's a realization. It's like Morpheus and Neo in 'The Matrix.' " He attends meetings at a local Kingdom Hall, and, like his fellow-witnesses, he leaves his gated community from time to time to knock on doors and proselytize. "Sometimes people act surprised, but mostly they're really cool about it," he said.

Recently, Prince hosted an executive who works for Philip Anschutz, the Christian businessman whose company owns the Staples Center. "We started talking red and blue," Prince said. "People with money—money like *that*—are not affected by the stock market, and they're not freaking out over anything. They're just watching. So here's how it is: you've got the Republicans, and basically they want to live according to *this*." He pointed to a Bible. "But there's the problem of interpretation, and you've got some churches, some people, basically doing things and saying it comes from here, but it doesn't. And then on the opposite end of the spectrum you've got blue, you've got the Democrats, and they're, like, 'You can do whatever you want.' Gay marriage, whatever. But neither of them is right."

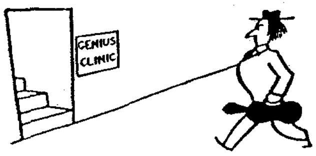
When asked about his perspective on social issues—gay marriage, abortion—Prince tapped his Bible and said, "God came to earth and saw people sticking it wherever and doing it with whatever, and he just cleared it all out. He was, like, 'Enough.' "

Later, in the dining room, eating a bowl of carrot soup, he talked about an encounter that he described as a "teaching moment." "There was this woman. She used to come to Paisley Park and just sit outside on the swings," he said. "So I went out there one day and I was, like, 'Hey, all my friends in there say you're a stalker. And that I should call the police. But I don't want to do that, so why don't you tell me what you want to happen. Why are you here? How do you want this to end?' And she didn't really have an answer for that. In the end, all she wanted was to be seen, for me to look at her. And she left and didn't come back."

—*Claire Hoffman*

COMMODITIES

FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS



Mark Ptashne, a molecular biologist in his late and skeptical sixties, is a precisionist in everything he does. For example, he won the Lasker Award for discovering exactly how genes are turned off and on. He owns a Gyro Swing golf club, which whirs as it responds to his swing and vibrates when he doesn't keep his left arm in the right position. And—his great passion in life—he owns and plays and lends out violins, two of which are artifacts of the most exacting craftsmanship. He began playing during his adolescence. "They say you can't really learn at that age," he said. "Like so much else 'they' say, that's bullshit." He has made a creditable CD to prove it. And he started a company, Genetics Institute, mainly in order to make enough money to buy one of his treasures—a Guarneri del Gesù. He now owns quite a few other fiddles yet is at pains to make it clear that he is not a collector but a musician and a devotee.

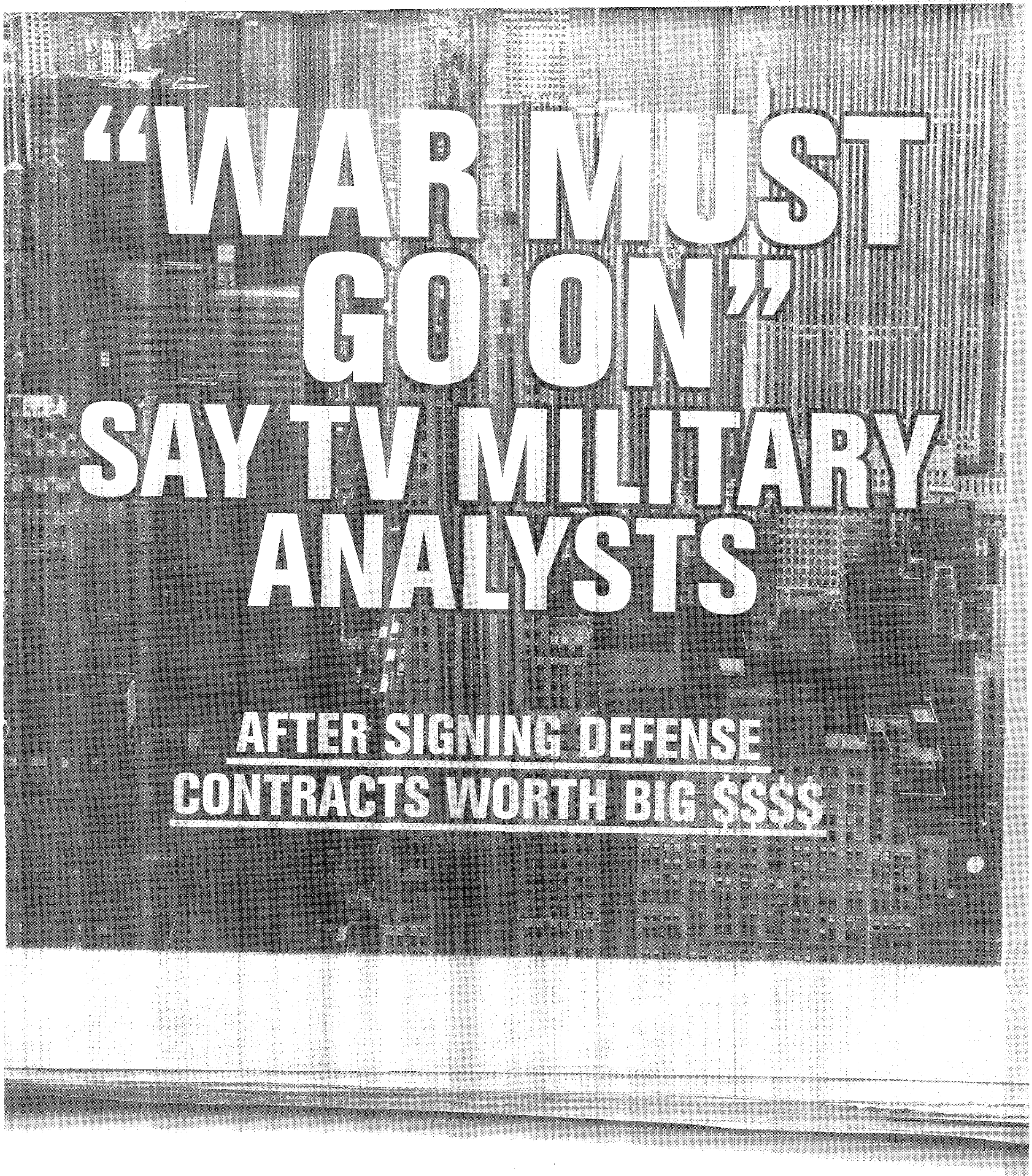
Both treasures—the Guarneri and a Stradivarius—were just lying out there the other day on top of a piano as Ptashne took a living-room practice golf swing. Lying there like hats or remotes or what-have-you. The Strad had seen action the night before at, of all places, the Blue Note, the jazz club in the Village. Luke Bulla, the fiddler in the band led by Jerry Douglas, Dobro virtuoso, was playing it. It had been lent to him, he said, by Ptashne, through a network that involved someone's brother-in-law. After the session, backstage, Mr. Bulla offered up the violin to hold. But the offeree, who has a very bad history with expensive wineglasses and vases, declined. This same offeree had recently read an article about violins being an excellent financial bet. Given our tempora and mores, he got curious about whether he had just seen the, um, soundest investment of all.

Arguably, he had. During the market upheavals of recent weeks, spot gold prices bobbed at around eight hundred dollars per ounce. The best Stradivarius violin, on the other hand, could have gone for something like seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars per ounce. That's twelve million dollars for an avoirdupois pound of wood, if you want to be crude about it, and why shouldn't you, these days? In this and in other ways, the great violins are, ounce for ounce, among the most valuable commodities in the world. There is even a Web site called stradivariinvest.com. Almost alone among investments, important violins have proved immune to economic downturns. Auction prices for Stradivariuses have increased from about two hundred thousand dollars in 1980 to about three million dollars today.

The person who provided those numbers is Stewart Pollens, who runs a business called the Violin Advisor and used to be a conservator of fine instruments at the Metropolitan Museum. "As opposed to paintings and other works of art, there are no fads here," he said last week. "Artists can be in or out. Few people want to acquire a gigantic Mother and Child oil these days."

But, like most violinophiles, Pollens, who is married to the violinist Stephanie Chase, cannot really see the instruments in quite the same light as, say, wheat futures. And that's the problem with violins as a market. Those who, like Ptashne, buy them because they love them often can't bear to sell them. "What am I going to do?" he had said in his living room. "The money is basically locked up." He put the Gyro Swing aside and played a little Bach on the Stradivarius on which Mr. Bulla had played a Bill Monroe tune just the night before. And then a little more Bach on the Guarneri—darker and more rustic in tone. It was melancholy music, as if to mourn a world in which not enough is not for sale.

—*Daniel Menaker*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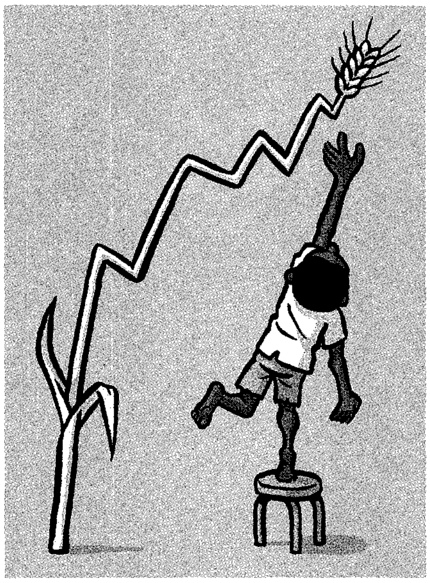
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE PERILS OF EFFICIENCY

This spring, disaster loomed in the global food market. Precipitous increases in the prices of staples like rice (up more than a hundred and fifty per cent in a few months) and maize provoked food riots, toppled governments, and threatened the lives of tens of millions. But the bursting of the commodity bubble eased those pressures, and food prices, while still high, have come well off the astronomical levels they hit in April. For Americans, the drop in commodity prices has put a few more bucks in people's pockets; in much of the developing world, it may have saved many from actually starving. So did the global financial crisis solve the global food crisis?

Temporarily, perhaps. But the recent price drop doesn't provide any long-term respite from the threat of food shortages or future price spikes. Nor has it reassured anyone about the health of the global agricultural system, which the crisis revealed as dangerously unstable. Four decades after the Green Revolution, and after waves of market reforms intended to transform agricultural production, we're still having a hard time insuring that people simply get enough to eat, and we seem to be more vulnerable to supply shocks than ever.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Over the past two decades, countries around the world have moved away from their focus on "food security" and handed market forces a greater role in shaping agricultural policy. Before the nineteen-eighties, developing countries had so-called "agricultural marketing boards," which would buy commodities from farmers at fixed prices (prices high enough to keep farmers farming), and then store them in strategic reserves that could be used in the event of bad harvests or soaring import prices. But in the eighties and nineties, often as part of structural-adjustment programs imposed by the I.M.F. or the World Bank, many marketing boards were eliminated or cut back, and grain reserves, deemed inefficient and unnecessary, were sold off. In the same way, structural-adjustment programs often did away with government investment in and subsidies to agriculture—most notably, subsidies for things like fertilizers and high-yield seeds.

The logic behind these reforms was simple: the market would allocate resources more efficiently than government, leading to greater productivity. Farmers, instead of growing subsidized maize and wheat at high cost, could concentrate on cash crops, like cashews and chocolate, and use the money they made to buy staple foods. If a country couldn't compete in the global economy, production would migrate to countries that could. It was also assumed that, once governments stepped out of the way, private investment would flood into agriculture, boosting performance. And international aid seemed a more efficient way of relieving food crises than relying on countries to maintain surpluses and food-security programs, which are wasteful and costly.



This "marketization" of agriculture has not, to be sure, been fully carried through. Subsidies are still endemic in rich countries and poor, while developing countries often place tariffs on imported food, which benefit their farmers but drive up prices for consumers. And in extreme circumstances countries restrict exports, hoarding food for their own citizens. Nonetheless, we clearly have a leaner, more market-friendly agricultural system than before. It looks, in fact, a bit like global manufacturing, with low inventories (wheat stocks are at their lowest since 1977), concentrated production (three countries provide ninety per cent of corn exports, and five countries provide eighty per cent of rice exports), and fewer redundancies. Governments have a much smaller role, and public spending on agriculture has been cut sharply.

The problem is that, while this system is undeniably more efficient, it's also much more fragile. Bad weather in just a few countries can wreak havoc across the entire system. When prices spike as they did this spring (for reasons that now seem not entirely obvious), the result is food shortages and malnutrition in poorer countries, since they are far more dependent on imports and have few food reserves to draw on. And, while higher prices and market reforms were supposed to bring a boom in agricultural productivity, global crop yields actually rose less between 1990 and 2007 than they did in the previous twenty years, in part because in many developing countries private-sector agricultural investment never materialized, while the cutbacks in government spending left them with feeble infrastructures.

These changes did not cause the rising prices of the past couple of years, but they have made them more damaging. The old emphasis on food security was undoubtedly costly, and often wasteful. But the redundancies it created also had tremendous value when things went wrong. And one sure thing about a system as complex as agriculture is that things will go wrong, often with devastating consequences. If the just-in-time system for producing cars runs into a hitch and the supply of cars shrinks for a while, people can easily adapt. When the same happens with food, people go hungry or even starve. That doesn't mean that we need to embrace price controls or collective farms, and there are sensible market reforms, like doing away with import tariffs, that would make developing-country consumers better off. But a few weeks ago Bill Clinton, no enemy of market reform, got it right when he said that we should help countries achieve "maximum agricultural self-sufficiency." Instead of a more efficient system, we should be trying to build a more reliable one.

—*James Surowiecki*

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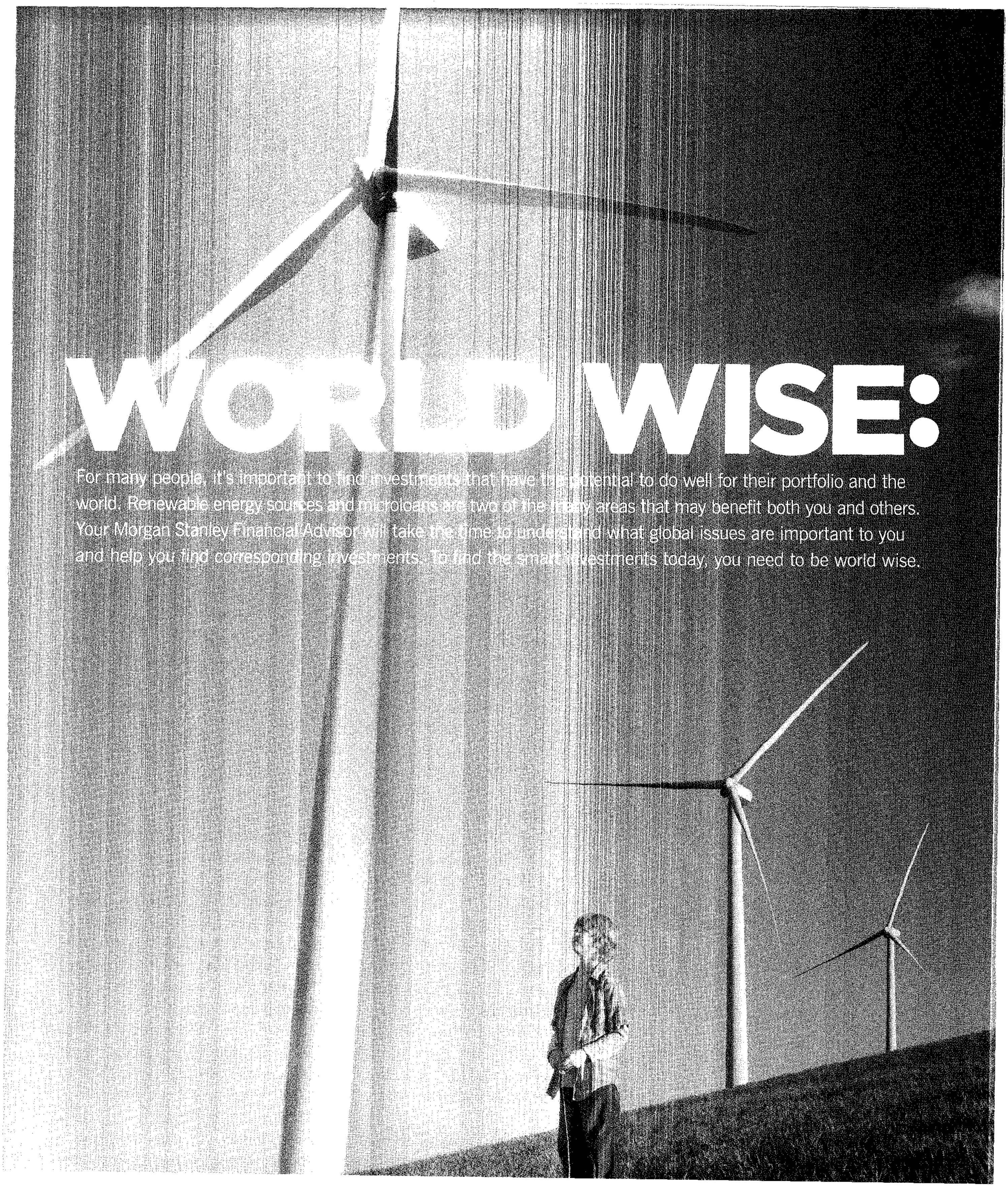
The Balance Sheet, James Surowiecki's blog.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



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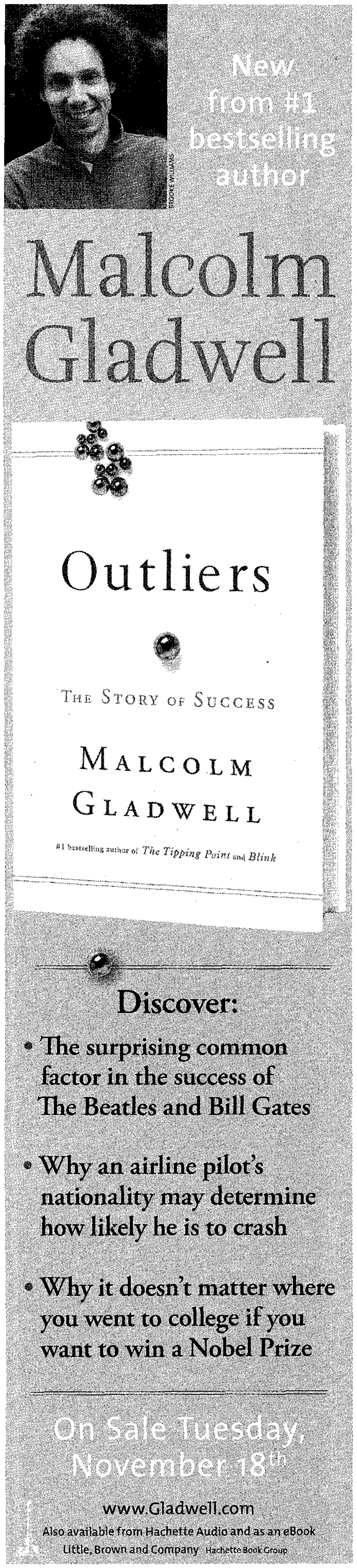
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EVICTION

The day they came for Addie Polk's house.

BY PETER J. BOYER

In the early afternoon on October 1st, Donald Fatheree, a sheriff's deputy in Akron, Ohio, drove his black-and-gold cruiser into one of Akron's dying neighborhoods and came to a stop in front of a small white wood-frame house, with a neatly trimmed lawn and a beige Chevrolet parked in the driveway. He had been there many times before. Part of Fatheree's job is to execute writs of possession, legal orders turning people out of their foreclosed homes—a disagreeable task mitigated, if only slightly, by the long grind of the process. Akron is so beset by foreclosures (there were several hundred last month) that it often takes a year or more for a foreclosure to result in an eviction. Fatheree tried to use that time to accustom people gradually to the idea of losing their home. He believed that a successful eviction required a skilled salesman (himself), who could negotiate, unofficially, between banks and evictees, possibly avoiding a forcible removal. Fatheree would explain to the resident that remaining in the house was not an option—it had already been sold at auction—but if the resident took steps to move out Fatheree might be able to negotiate a little extra time from the banks. Most people followed Fatheree's advice and removed themselves before their final eviction date arrived. For the others, there was a standard procedure: they were escorted from the premises by a sheriff's deputy, and a moving van transported all their possessions to a local storage facility; if the belongings were not claimed within a month, they were sold.

Fatheree had already handled one forcible eviction that day, and the little white house was next on his list. The prospect made him a bit uneasy. In only the rarest cases—maybe one in a hundred—did eviction day arrive without his having had some contact with the resident of the home. The little white house was such a case. Fatheree had gone there countless times, delivering official notices and, sometimes, just stopping by on his own. His knocks on the door were never answered, but he believed that someone was inside; the notices he left, bright-yellow documents with "Sheriff" written on them, were always gone when he returned. A month before the eviction, he had, as required by Ohio law, posted the formal eviction notice by attaching it with duct tape to the front door. He'd returned to the house the day before, leaving one last note, along with his office and cell-phone numbers, in case the resident wished to talk. When, finally, he arrived for the eviction, Fatheree knew little more about the person inside than the information contained in the original foreclosure complaint: "Addie Polk, an unmarried woman."

You could never be sure what awaited on the other side of the door. As a precaution, Fatheree brought along another deputy, Jason Beam. Fatheree knocked on the front door, and, once again, no answer came. According to department policy, the evicting officers could not enter the premises unless they were accompanied by a representative from the bank. In this case, the defaulted loan had been made by Countrywide Home Loans, and had been assumed by the Federal National Mortgage Association, or Fannie Mae, which had acquired the house at a sheriff's auction in June. The house, appraised at forty-two thousand dollars, had sold for twenty-eight thousand. No one from Countrywide had yet arrived, and the two deputies decided to wait. Another deputy, Dave Bailey, happened by, and stopped to say hello. It was a lovely day, and soon the three officers were chatting in the sunshine just a few paces from the front porch. After a time, they were joined by a curious neighbor, Robert Dillon, who owned the house next door.

Dillon told the deputies that, yes, Addie Polk did live there. She and her husband, Robert, had moved into the neighborhood in 1970, the same year that Dillon and his wife bought their house. The community, largely black, had been solidly working class back then. Akron's three rubber giants—Goodyear, Goodrich, and Firestone—had provided more than enough opportunity for anyone who wanted work. But Akron's factories were challenged by innovations abroad. As jobs disappeared, the neighborhood began to fray. The street's brick roadbed now pushes up through the asphalt in big patches, and nearly every other house is empty or for sale. Robert Polk, who retired from the Goodrich plant, died in 1995, and Dillon, a taciturn Mississippi transplant, helps his widowed neighbor when he can, installing her air-conditioner and shovelling snow in winter.

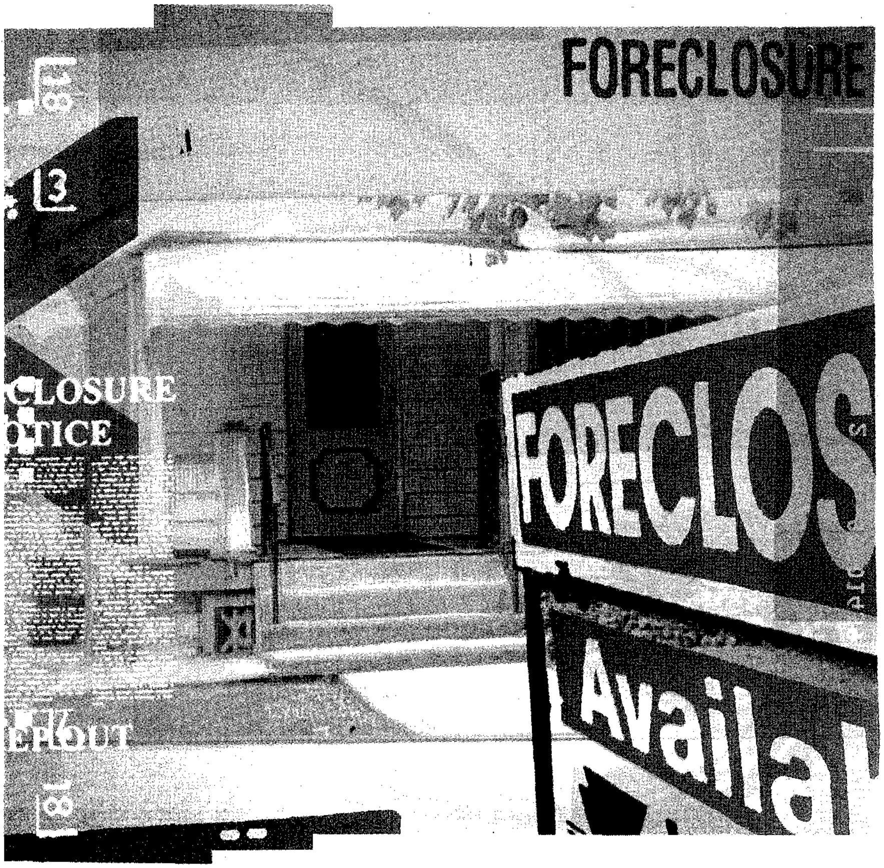
Dillon was surprised to hear that Addie Polk's home had been foreclosed. She'd never let on about any financial difficulties. But, then, she was a very private person. She often didn't answer her door or her telephone (Dillon had failed to reach her by phone that morning), and she had no children and no other relatives in Akron. But even in her old age Miss Polk, as Dillon called her, remained determinedly independent. She drove herself to the grocery store and, every Sunday morning at nine o'clock, to services at Antioch Baptist Church, half a mile away.

Countrywide's representative never arrived. Fatheree was ready to leave, and have the eviction rescheduled, when the men heard a noise inside the house. Dillon, worried that Addie had fallen and needed help, said that he knew a way to get in, and Fatheree told him to try. Dillon fetched a ladder, climbed to a second-floor bathroom window, and worked it open. He stepped inside and called for Addie, but heard no reply. Fatheree's official eviction notice, the duct tape attached, lay on a bedroom dresser. Dillon found Addie in bed, reclined on her side, apparently asleep. A gun lay beside her, and he recalls wondering, Huh? Why is Miss Polk sleeping with a gun in her bed?

Two days later, Dennis Kucinich, the Democratic congressman from Cleveland, was in his Washington office browsing the Internet when he came across the story of Addie Polk from the Akron *Beacon-Journal:*

> At the age of 90, Addie Polk found herself in foreclosure this week, about to be forced from the home she's lived in for nearly 40 years.
>
> So, with a gun in her hand, the Akron widow apparently shot herself in the chest Wednesday afternoon as deputies were knocking on her door with eviction papers in hand.
>
> While a nation reels in financial crisis from years of mortgage abuse, Polk is recovering at Akron General Medical Center, awaiting word on where she will live when she's released.

For Kucinich, the story seemed providential. At the moment, his colleagues in the House were in the final stages of debate over the Bush Administration's bailout of the U.S. financial system, a plan that Kucinich angrily opposed. He saw the plan as an undeserved rescue of the very institutions that had caused the crisis, while guaranteeing no relief for people who were losing their homes to foreclosure. The Addie Polk story seemed to capture the disparity; Countrywide and Fannie Mae had been bailed out, but Addie Polk was left fearfully hiding from her fate.



By the end of June, 2.4 million homes were in foreclosure or prolonged deliquency.

ALEX WILLIAMSON

Kucinich ran from his office, in the Rayburn House Office Building, to the Capitol, reaching the floor of the House as debate was winding down, and told Addie's story. "This bill does nothing for the Addie Polks of the world," Kucinich said. "This bill fails to address the fact that millions of homeowners are facing foreclosure, are facing the loss of their home. This bill will take care of Wall Street, and the market may go up for a few days, but democracy is going downhill."

Kucinich later told me that Addie Polk's predicament had struck a particular chord with him. "My story's a little bit different than some of the members of Congress," he said. "When I grew up in Cleveland, the oldest of seven, my parents never owned a home. They moved around a lot. We lived in twenty-one different places by the time I was seventeen, including a couple of cars. I've had the experience of being evicted. I understand what it's like to have people carrying your stuff out and putting it down on the curb. I did this as a child. Children are pretty resilient—they can overcome just about anything. But when someone's a little bit older, and you're the breadwinner, or, in Addie Polk's case, you're a widow, and you're ninety years old, where do you go?"

After his speech on the House floor, Kucinich returned to his office and in-

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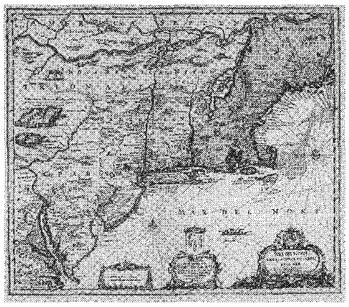

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structed an aide to get in touch with Fannie Mae about Addie's case, "and see what the hell they are doing." That afternoon, a Fannie Mae spokesman, Brian Faith, announced that the institution would forgive Addie's debt and cancel further proceedings against her. "Just given the circumstances, we think it's appropriate," Faith said. "It certainly made our radar screen." Three weeks later, the same attorney for Countrywide who had filed the complaint arranged a transfer of deed, putting the house back in Addie Polk's name.

Even so, Kucinich said that he means to investigate the case through the Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee on domestic policy, which he chairs. The circumstances of Addie Polk's debt do seem curious. Summit County property records show that Addie and Robert Polk bought their home in 1970, for ten thousand dollars, and that when Robert died and Addie became the sole owner, in 1995, the house was fully paid for. Then, in 1997, Addie was offered a new mortgage on the place, which she accepted, for twenty-one thousand dollars. Four years later, after interest rates declined and real-estate values increased, an independent mortgage broker sold Addie a new loan, for $46,400, and peddled it to America's Wholesale Lender, a division of Countrywide. Then, in 2004, after interest rates dropped further and housing prices increased even more, she took out yet another loan from Countrywide. That loan, in the amount of $45,620, was paired with a line of credit for $11,380. Addie was eighty-six. The mortgage was scheduled to be paid off on May 1, 2034.

"What I'm interested in determining is the extent to which lenders targeted elderly people as potential customers in order to go after a class of people that they knew, actuarially, it was impossible that they were going to be around to the conclusion of the mortgage," Kucinich says. "And they had a limited ability to repay. Lenders had to know this. And they did it anyhow, because it appears they were more interested in booking higher and higher sales."

Kucinich says that he wants to find out who at Countrywide wrote the loan for Addie, and how it got approved. "The forensics of this have to be thoroughly explored," he said. "As we get into it, I think it's going to demonstrate the degree of depravity in this mortgage business."

Lolita Adair became a real-estate agent in 1963, and a broker in 1979, at a time when Akron had few black brokers, none of them women. When the current foreclosure crisis hit, the city-council president, Marco Sommerville, asked Adair to head a task force on predatory lending. Now, when constituents come to him with mortgage problems, he directs them to Adair. "She knows the answer to questions before you finish asking them," Sommerville says.

I met Adair, a stately woman in her sixties, in her office, in downtown Akron, a few days after the Addie Polk incident, and she agreed to show me around. As we made our way through town in her white Cadillac, past the housing project where LeBron James once lived, through neighborhoods where "For Sale" signs competed for space with "Obama" signs, Adair told me stories about the predatory lending that had occurred. "Mortgage brokers started cropping up like dandelions on your front lawn after a spring rain," she said. Solicitations for easy loans, using one's house as collateral, came in the mail, in telephone calls, and sometimes from door-to-door hucksters. "You put a slick and a con man together," she said, "and you have predatory lenders." People who accepted loans on terms that seemed too good to be true later found themselves confronted with hidden costs or huge balloon payments, or sudden, upward adjustments in the rates they thought they had agreed to. When they couldn't make their payments, many of them, embarrassed or confused, ignored the legal notices that began to arrive, and soon found themselves ruined and dislodged.

"Some of the stories are so tragic," Adair said. She spoke of how the business had turned upside down in the forty-five years since she entered it. Back then, the tragedy belonged to those who couldn't get loans because they lived in black neighborhoods and were redlined by banks out of the possibility of getting a loan. Adair says that is part of the reason that she became a broker; she served several terms on the local fair-housing board.

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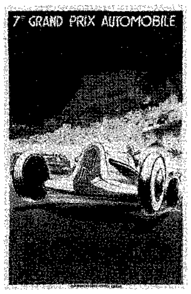

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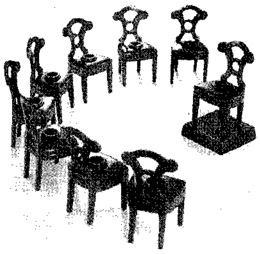

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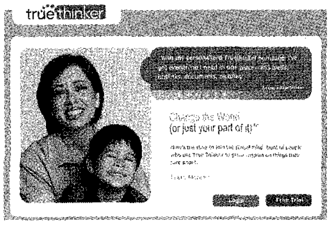

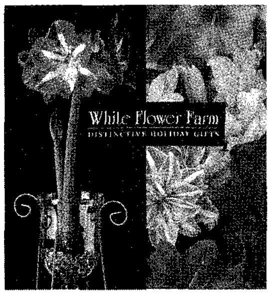

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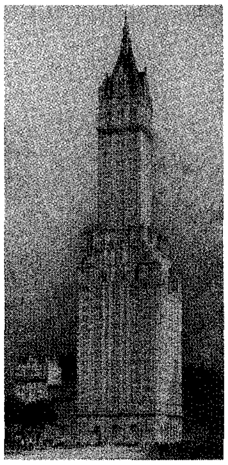

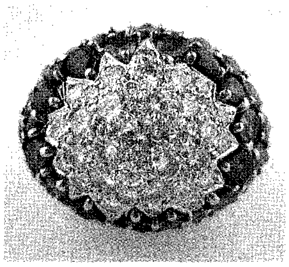

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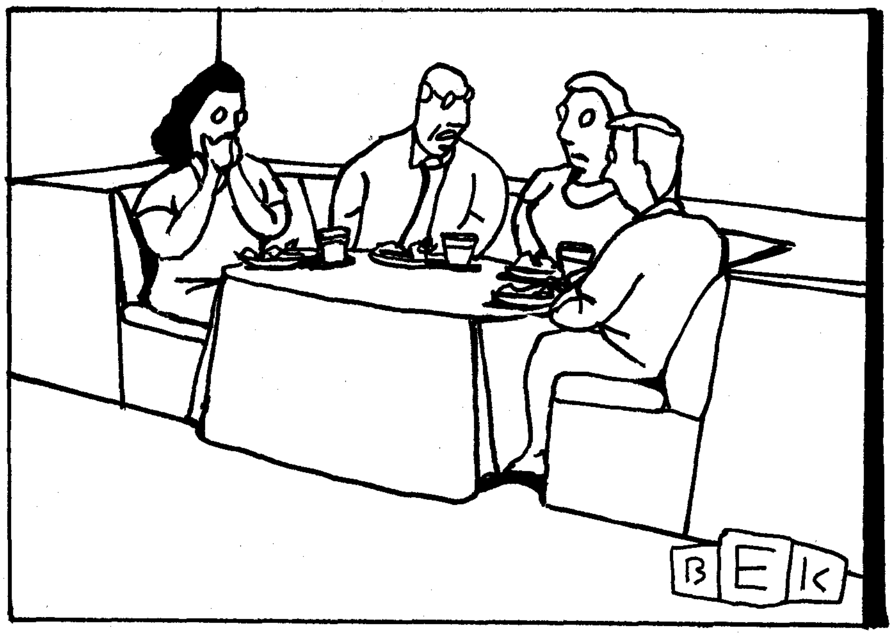


"Mary has an intense fear of eating overdressed salad."

• •

their house, the federal government had begun making it easier for the less well off to buy homes. But, Adair says, reform was too often reflexive, rather than measured, and that brought a new set of problems. By the nineteen-nineties, the government had all but mandated that more loans be made to people once considered too risky. Some lenders were eager to venture into the untapped marketplace, and property values (and profits) soared. Angelo Mozilo, Countrywide's chief executive, told the *Wall Street Journal* in 1996 that he personally reviewed two hundred low-income minority loan applications that had concerned his underwriters, and approved about seventy per cent of them, in order to send a message to his organization. Approving such loans, Mozilo conceded, meant that "lenders have had to stretch the rules a bit."

People who once found it too difficult to get loans, because of where they lived, and who they were, now found it almost too easy. "What happened was, once the lenders got into the community and found that where interest rates for normal borrowers were somewhere around five per cent to six per cent—you could start with a credit-impaired borrower at nine per cent," Adair said. "As a result, it was, like, 'There's money there! We can make money.' "

A key player in these changes was Fannie Mae, created during the Depression to loosen money in the home-mortgage market. Fannie Mae does not make loans directly; rather, it buys loans made by primary lenders, thus freeing capital for other loans. Fannie Mae's requirements for loan-worthiness set the standard for the industry; loan applications that did not meet Fannie's standards were, by definition, subprime candidates. In 1999, in response to government pressure to expand low-to-moderate-income homeownership, Fannie Mae began to lower its credit-approval standards.

What is striking about Addie Polk's loan is that it wasn't "predatory," in the common usage of that term. Her 2004 Countrywide mortgage was a conventional prime loan, with a fixed thirty-year mortgage. In Adair's view, that makes Addie no less a victim. "Just because Addie Polk's loan is not an adjustable-rate mortgage," she said, "the fact that this was someone who had her home paid off and was encouraged to mortgage her home, time after time, without sound lending practices, makes it a predatory loan."

When Fannie Mae (or its younger cousin, Freddie Mac) bought a loan, it pooled it with other loans and sold it to investors as a security—like a share of stock. These mortgage-backed securities came to be prized by investors, because they were seen as being a safe investment, backed, as they were, by American real estate. As home prices spiralled upward and demand for the securities increased, here and abroad, so did marketplace pressure to create more mortgages. Primary lending institutions were happy to oblige; it's easier to make a risky loan if it's going to be bought by Fannie Mae, bundled with other loans, and turned into a security. Whether it got bundled and sold again or stayed on Fannie's books, Addie Polk's mortgage almost certainly found its way into someone's investment portfolio.

That investment, though, was still seen as relatively safe, partly because of Fannie Mae's peculiar nature as a quasi-governmental enterprise. When an investor bought a security that was backed by loans like Addie Polk's, Fannie Mae guaranteed payment even if the borrower defaulted. Fannie was able to do this by exploiting its ability, as a government-sponsored enterprise, to borrow money at lower rates than its competitors. "Because it had the word 'federal' in it, and because it was a government entity, it could borrow at near Treasury rates," Jim Leach, the former Republican congressman who attended last week's G-20 conference on behalf of President-elect Obama, said.

In Addie Polk's case, Fannie bought the loan for which she promised to pay Countrywide 6.375 per cent interest on forty-five thousand dollars, and may have then packaged that loan with others into a security that paid investors a lower amount—say, 6.125 per cent. Fannie's quarter-point profit amounted to an insurance pool against defaults. This worked, until Fannie Mae became swamped by defaults; in the event, the government stepped in for a rescue. Countrywide had passed the risk on to Fannie, which, in essence, passed the risk up to the government—a circumstance that critics have called "privatizing profit but socializing risk."

When home values dropped and credit markets tightened, making refinancing difficult, strapped borrowers had no recourse but default, and eventual foreclosure. Last week, Fannie and Freddie announced a plan meant to address that inequity for some borrowers, promising to sponsor loan modifications for homeowners who are at least three months late on payments. By the end of June, there were 2.4 million homes in foreclosure or prolonged delinquency, accounting for 4.5 per cent of all mortgages in the country—the highest level ever recorded. The primary lenders servicing those loans—like Countrywide—would earn new fees for the loan adjustments.

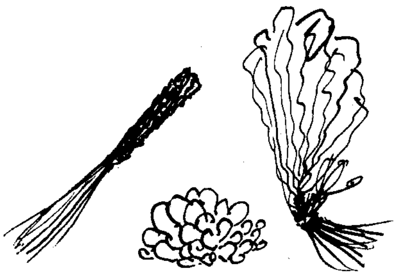
Adair turned onto La Croix Avenue and came to a stop across from Addie's house. When we got out of the car, we were met by Robert Dillon, who had been told by Adair to expect us. We talked about Addie, and when the subject of her loan came up Dillon looked at Addie's house and shook his head. The roof was patched, the fascia was rotting, and the porch sagged underfoot. He remarked, "When they said forty-five thousand dollars, I said, 'Where'd the money go? I don't see it.'" (Marco Sommerville, the council president, had wondered the same thing. "It's the obvious question," he'd told me, and suggested that an investigation might be warranted. "There are some people who feel there's a snake in the cockpit somewhere.")

Adair, however, was annoyed by the question, and thought the answer was self-evident, considering the string of loans that Addie took out beginning in 1997. "Everybody asks what happened to the money!" she said. "But twenty-some thousand of it went to pay off that first mortgage, when she had that forty-six-thousand-dollar mortgage. Then she was back with a forty-five-thousand-odd mortgage a year and a half later. That's when they gave her the eleven-thousand-dollar line of credit. The lady, just on pure, simple mathematics—if her husband's been dead since 1995, that's thirteen years for her to be living on her own, and she probably did not work—"

"No, no, she didn't," Dillon said.

"—and her only income would have been from his retirement."

"I don't know. Four hundred a month? Plus Social Security."



"She probably didn't have a thousand dollars a month that she was living on."

Adair said that she didn't know Addie Polk, but she had known lots of people like her, and could imagine the circumstances that led to her catastrophe. "Here was an elderly lady whose home was paid off, who was getting telephone calls, or people knocking on the doors," she said. "You'd be surprised in some of our neighborhoods how many people have told me that they actually came knocking on their door. They tell you you might have some medical bills, or you can consolidate all of your loans into one payment. You can repair your house, or you might want to take a vacation. I mean, they go through all of this, and they do it in a way of asking you, 'Do you have some credit cards you could pay off? Do you have some medical bills?' And, of course, if you're elderly, and you say yes, you have medical bills or what have you, 'Oh, well, we can put them all into one payment, and this will not hurt you, because it's the equity you have in your home.' What they don't tell you is, those doctors' bills are not charging you any interest; now we're gonna start charging you some interest."

Most of the money that Addie received was automatically used to pay off the previous loan; in the process, the home that she'd once owned outright was stripped of its equity. She kept up with her payments on the last mortgage—$284.61—for a time, then missed a few; by last year, she had stopped making payments altogether. When Countrywide called to inquire about late payments, she would listen for a few minutes and then hang up the phone.

Dillon said that the week after Addie shot herself he and his wife visited her in the hospital. The gun she had used, a .38-calibre handgun, had inflicted a serious wound in her shoulder, and no journalists have been allowed to speak with her. Dillon said that Addie seemed remorseful about the incident, and told him, "It was a crazy thing to do."

She brightened, Dillon said, when he told her that she was getting her home back. "She said, 'I am?' I said, 'Yeah, you're gonna get it back.' She was real happy to hear that." But Dillon didn't know how or if she would return home. ♦

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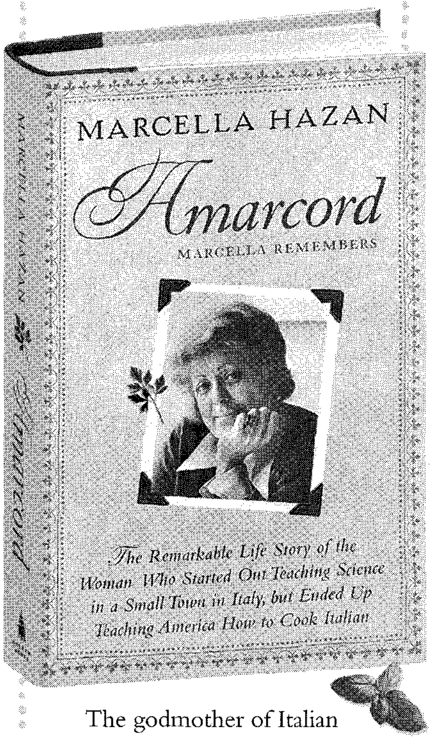
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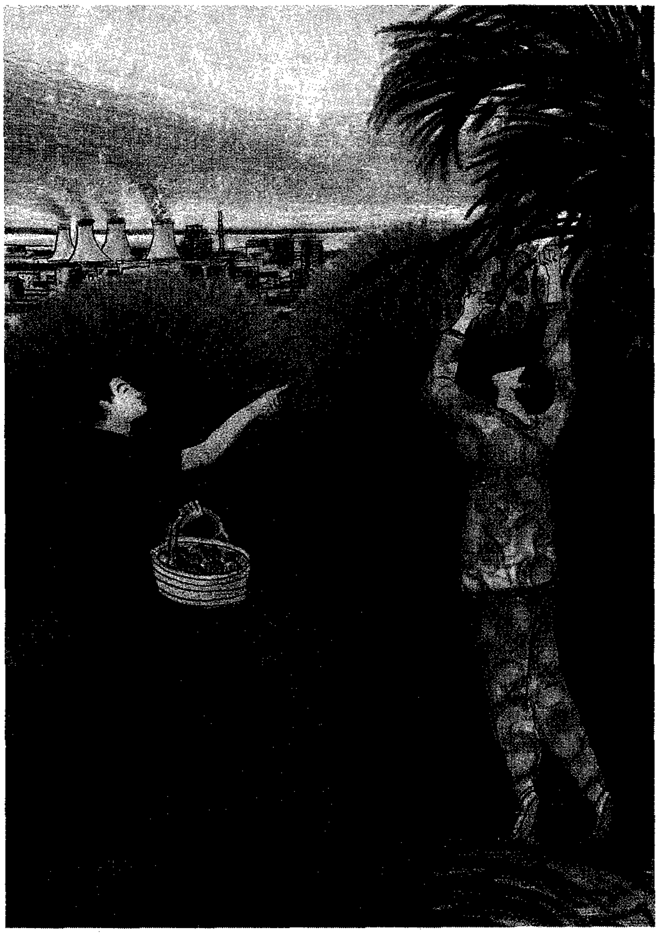
GARDEN OF CONTENTMENT

In a toxic era, a Hangzhou restaurant pursues purity.

BY FUCHSIA DUNLOP



China's boom has imperilled age-old cultivation and foraging.

One day in September, I joined the Chinese restaurateur Dai Jianjun for a foraging expedition on a remote mountainside in Zhejiang Province. Ahead of us, our guide, Bao Laichun, cleared a path, hacking at branches with a bamboo-handled machete. The hawthorn trees around us were heavy with fruit, and, amid bamboo groves and tall grasses, birds and grasshoppers sang, butterflies flitted, and vivid beetles crawled on the ground. It was early in the morning, and the mountaintops were still obscured by mist. "You just can't trust the ingredients you buy in the markets," Dai told me, battling his way through the undergrowth. "Vegetables laced with chemicals. Fake birds' nests held together by glue. Even hairy crabs from Yangcheng Lake—most of them are farmed elsewhere and simply made to 'take a shower' in the famous lake before they go to market." Bao vanished into the undergrowth, reappearing halfway up a pine tree that was swathed in a large-leafed vine. He shook the vine to show us the wild kiwifruits that hung from its stems, and began to slash at it, throwing branches to the ground. We plucked off the walnut-size fruits and filled a basket with them. Then we made our way back to Bao's farmhouse, stopping occasionally to taste wild chestnuts and grapes, and for Bao to dig a wild-lily bulb out of the earth with his knife.

Dai is the owner of the Dragon Well Manor, a restaurant in Hangzhou, the provincial capital. In an age of industrialization, dire pollution, and frequent food scares, the Dragon Well Manor is committed to offering its guests a kind of prelapsarian Chinese cuisine. Dai assures them that everything he serves will be made from natural ingredients, untainted by pesticides or melamine, and with no added MSG. Each morning, his buyers drive out into the countryside to collect the best of the season's produce. Often they make several trips in a day: a quick dash to a nearby farm to pick up freshly harvested vegetables; a longer journey to inspect a pig or collect a consignment of eggs; an evening excursion for freshwater fish, shrimp, and eels. At other times, they will drive into the mountains, hike for hours, and then stay overnight before returning to Hangzhou with, say, a batch of wild shiitake mushrooms. Dai accompanies them when he feels like it, partly because he enjoys the outing and partly, as he told me with a mischievous grin, to make sure they don't cheat him by buying produce in a supermarket.

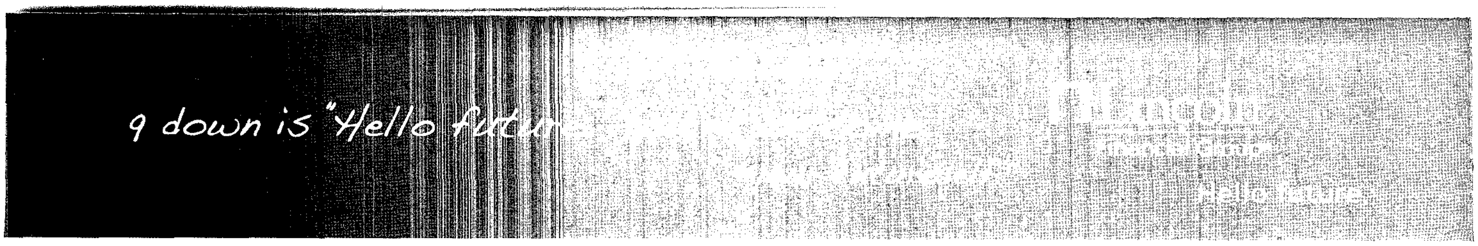
The Manor has never advertised and steers clear of media attention, but it has a devoted following among Zhejiang's public figures and wealthy businessmen, who come to unwind on the secluded terraces of its landscaped garden before retiring to a private room for a dinner of seasonal delicacies. Guests can look through the "purchase diary," a large leather-bound volume containing copies of each day's contracts with the farmers and artisans who supply the kitchens, along with photographs of them picking vegetables, making rice wine, and slaughtering pigs. Dai has never heard of Chez Panisse or Stone Barns, but he is engaged in a similar mission: to guarantee the integrity of his food supplies while shoring up a dying culinary and agricultural heritage.

Dai, now in his fortieth year, is an affable man with a square brow beneath a dark brush of hair, and a cigarette, as often as not, on the go. He grew up in Hangzhou, the son of a low-ranking Communist Party official and a factory worker. Like many of his generation, he was given a good socialist name, Dai Jianjun (Dai Build-the-Army), though these days everyone calls him by the nickname A Dai. An early interest in food was encouraged by his grandmother. "She instilled in me

LORENZO MATTOTTI

Thanksgiving
Weekend - 2035

There are some meals you just never forget.
That turkey was the driest I'd ever eaten.
Serves us right for not listening to Mom.
Before we ate that day, I remember looking at
the expressions on our kids' faces. The moment
really struck me. That's when I realized how
important it was to take care of my family.
Not just then, but throughout our lives. I'm glad
Eddie and I received some solid financial advice
to help ensure good times like these would always last.
Nowadays, I may be retired from making Thanksgiving
dinner, and I'm OK with that. Mainly because
I have a few recipes of my own to pass on.



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■	■	■	1	2	3	■	4	5	6	■	■	■
7	8	9				■	10			11	12	13
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37				38			■	39			40	41
42						■	43					
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■	■	■	46			■	47			■	■	■

ACROSS

1. Pourboire
4. Show patrons to their seats (informal)
7. Aromatic rice the color of terra-cotta
10. Parsnip-itty
14. The Pearl of the Black Sea
15. Fig-grower sacred in Buddhism, __ __
16. Edible seeds-producing legume
17. Pastry that goes well with #6-Down: 2 wds.
18. Dough-raising agent
20. Send a dinner party invite in one, for short
21. Active volcano of Japan
23. Tiller's task: to __
24. __ pointer (lecturer's device)
26. "__ *Wiedersehen!*"
27. Short-order cook's shout, "__ __ go!"
29. Work with a wok
30. Brush aside
32. Place for a *pêcheur*
33. Peer Gynt's mother
34. Milkman's way-to-go, briefly
35. Pour slowly, as a sommelier would
37. Pinot __ (one variety used in making Champagne)
39. Feelings-feeler, say
42. Nectar of the Hindu gods
43. "__ __ for me, thanks." (b'day party dessert refusal)
44. Kitchen gadget
45. Northern Scottish archipelago (home of Grimbister cheese)
46. Bad __ (German spa resort)
47. Pleasure god of ancient Egypt

DOWN

1. Coffee cup in Corsica
2. Butternut squash, now: 2 wds.
3. East Indies perennial herb
4. Peri-____ agriculture
5. "__ '__' is the mantra I should repeat?" asked the meditation rookie.
6. Afternoon brew: 2 wds.
7. Vintage jukebox music, doo-___
8. URL suffix of a college
9. Time traveler's salutation
11. Healthy eatery edict: 3 wds.
12. Waiters
13. Even so
17. Carats connoisseur
19. German winery renowned for its Rieslings, Weingut __ Hövel
21. Belonging to Mr. Milne
22. Velouté made with chicken stock, ____ sauce
24. ____ Movement, for environmentally conscious foodies
25. Reuben requirement
28. Tic __ (tiny mint)
31. Memo heading about Egypt's famous river, maybe
35. Sweetie pies
36. Chef's battle scars
37. Navigation aid
38. Particular on a shopping list
40. Squeeze or __ out
41. *Corona* wearer
43. San Francisco's __ Hill

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1. This challenge starts November 17, 2008, 12:01 A.M. ET, and ends 12 A.M. ET, December 22, 2008. Each individual crossword contest will last a month from issue newsstand date.
2. Contestants may enter the contest by correctly completing and submitting the Lincoln Financial Group crossword via mail, or by submitting a photocopy thereof found in the November 24, 2008, issue of *The New Yorker*. Contestants must include name, address, telephone, and e-mail address in the envelope addressed to The New Yorker Promotion Department, attn: "Hello Future," 4 Times Square, 21st floor, New York, NY 10036. Contestants may also enter online at www.futuresweeps.com.
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6. One entry per household for the Lincoln Financial Group Crossword challenge.
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the idea that cooking was about *ben wei*, the essential tastes of things," he told me.

Dai spent six years running a restaurant catering to the Hangzhou tourist trade, made a lot of money, and then decided that he wanted to do something more rewarding. "Originally, I just had the idea of creating a landscaped garden, a beautiful place that would showcase the culture of Hangzhou," he said. "But I needed to find a way to make it pay for itself, which is why I decided that it could also be a restaurant."

The Lower Yangtze Region, in which Hangzhou lies, has long been a cultural center. The Song-dynasty poet Su Dongpo served as governor of the city in the eleventh century, and since then the region has been associated with the cultivated life of the Chinese literati, scholar-gentlemen who spent their leisure hours writing poetry and conversing in gardens and teahouses. Hangzhou is one of China's most attractive cities—Marco Polo described it as "without doubt the finest and most splendid city in the world." It is particularly renowned for its West Lake, whose shores are framed by hills and ornamented with temples and pagodas.

The wider region, encompassing Zhejiang and Jiangsu Provinces, is known as *yu mi zhi xiang*, "land of fish and rice," for its fertile soil, easy climate, and plentiful produce. From its lakes, rivers, and canals come not only fish but also eels, crab, and shrimp, as well as aquatic vegetables like water bamboo, water chestnut, and lotus. Bamboo grows in the hills, and rice in the paddy fields; other specialties include water shield—an aquatic herb, from Taihu Lake, near the city of Suzhou—and intensely flavored cured ham from Jinhua. In the fall, people come from all over the Chinese mainland to eat the famous hairy crabs of Yangcheng Lake.

The cooking of the Lower Yangtze Region is subtler and more delicate than Sichuanese or Hunanese cuisines, and its character is more difficult to pinpoint. A renowned chef I met in Hangzhou told me, "Our flavors are as varied as the Sichuanese, but they tend to be light and bright, without that heavy spiciness. We emphasize seasonal produce, and the essential tastes of our raw ingredients." He pointed out that Hangzhou cooking uses comparatively little oil, salt, sugar, or starch—which, he suggested, makes it healthier than other Chinese cuisines—and that it heeds Confucius' insistence on fine and delicately cut food.

In 2000, Dai started renting a plot of land on the outskirts of Hangzhou. It was a derelict plant nursery with a few shabby buildings and concrete yards, but it lay amid the picturesque tea fields of the district of Longjing, or Dragon Well. He began landscaping the site, but the restaurant itself started in an ad-hoc manner. "It was really more of a hobby than a business," he said. "We began by inviting people we knew to taste a few things, and then they recommended the place to their friends."

We were talking over green tea in his study one afternoon. When Dai is not out with his buyers, managing the restaurant, or socializing with his guests, he retreats to this quiet room, which has its own courtyard and a view of the hills, to read and write or play the guqin, an ancient Chinese zither.

After a year, Dai told me, he closed the restaurant for refurbishment. He hired elderly craftsmen to design and plant the garden, and to construct a series of wood-framed buildings in a broadly traditional Hangzhou style. He became preoccupied with the idea of reviving the dishes known by past generations. He had read the work of Yuan Mei, China's Brillat-Savarin, an eighteenth-century scholar-gentleman who abandoned his career as an imperial bureaucrat to retire to Nanjing, where he designed his own garden and wrote a seminal cookbook, "Food Lists of the Garden of Contentment." Although, as an educated man, Yuan Mei probably never cooked himself, he was a meticulous gourmet. He recorded his impressions at dinners in grand houses and collected recipes from Buddhist monasteries. He gave his chefs detailed instructions and quizzed them on culinary practice. He had a dislike of flashy cooking, and once wrote of going home hungry after a forty-dish banquet.

Dai decided that his restaurant would have the kind of Hangzhou dishes that Yuan Mei would have enjoyed, prepared with local ingredients according to the theories of Chinese medicine and the solar terms of the old agricultural calendar. He wanted to serve things that are rare in restaurants: "the nourishing soups given to nursing mothers, humble vegetables, cooling dishes to be eaten in the heat of summer." He told me that Yuan Mei had insisted that the art of cookery began with the selection of the raw ingredients. "He believed that a chef could take credit for only sixty per cent of the success of a banquet, and that whoever did the shopping should take credit for the rest," Dai said. "He wrote that just as a stupid person would remain stupid even if taught by Confucius and Mencius, a poor ingredient would be tasteless even if cooked by Yi Ya, the legendary Chinese chef of the Zhou dynasty."

Dai was also influenced by a booklet he had read about scientific advances and the food of the future. "I came to believe that when you change the life cycle of a plant or an animal you end up with something that is barely the same species," he said. "I decided that my restaurant would use only traditional produce, free from chemicals and genetic modification."

In early-twenty-first-century China, Dai had set himself an almost impossible task. Gastronomy, like most aspects of Chinese culture, suffered in the Maoist years. Early Communists associated fine dining with the corrupt excesses of the old regime. In 1927, Mao Zedong witnessed peasant associations in Hunan ban the recreational activities of the wealthy, including banqueting. Mao himself had a lifelong dislike of refined and exotic food, preferring the coarse ingredients and robustly spicy flavors of Hunanese peasant cooking. The nationalization of private business, largely completed by 1956, is remembered as the start of a long decline for China's restaurants. Later, the Cultural Revolution led to a general assault on bourgeois pastimes, including fine dining. Elderly chefs were taunted by their apprentices, and elegant restaurants were instructed to serve "cheap and substantial food" for the masses.

The spread of monosodium glutamate on the Chinese cookery scene, in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, induced further amnesia about some of the core arts of traditional cooking. MSG, which was identified in seaweed in 1908 by a Japanese scientist and launched as a commercial product soon after, became popular in China at a time when food was short, and basic ingredients were rationed. For people unable to afford meat with their rice, MSG—which is known in Chinese as *wei jing*, “the essence of flavor”—offered a magical shortcut to umami flavors. By the mid-nineties, it had become an inescapable ingredient in professional kitchens, eclipsing the old skills of making stocks from whole fowl, pork ribs, and dried seafood.

The past decade or two have seen other changes in the way Chinese people eat. As recently as the early nineties, many Chinese lived on a diet of fresh seasonal produce bought from street markets. Supermarkets, refrigerators, and processed foods were rare. Since then, urban sprawl has encroached on arable fields; street markets and small restaurants have been swept away as cities are redeveloped; and Western fast-food chains have opened branches all over the country. Meanwhile, firms such as Carrefour and Tesco have persuaded the middle classes to shop in supermarkets, and processed foods have become widely available. And as the Chinese demand more meat, to supplement their traditional diet of grains and vegetables, there has been a dramatic increase in intensive animal farming.

This sudden elongation of the food chain and the industrialization of food production have been accompanied by an explosion of health scares; the recent scandals of baby milk, chocolate, and eggs tainted by melamine are just the latest. Corruption has obstructed attempts to crack down on rogue food companies; in 2007, the former head of the State Food and Drug Administration was executed for taking bribes and dereliction of duty. Pollution is rife, with widespread contamination of farmland and irrigation water. A recent survey found that food safety was a major concern of the Chinese public.

Inevitably, there is a growing market for *lü se shi pin*, “green food products,” for which newly affluent consumers are willing to pay a premium. Some restaurants offer dishes made with “pollution-free” pork raised in Tibet or wild mushrooms from supposedly pristine forests. Specialist tea companies sell leaves from plantations that are purportedly far from the fallout of factory chimneys. But, with a rampant black market in fake products of every description, it is hard to know which claims to believe.

For Dai, the only solution was to cut out the middlemen and source his own ingredients from producers. “My family thought I was crazy, trying to buy everything from the countryside—my mother told me I’d go bankrupt!” he said. “Most of our farmers can’t supply us in any great quantity, so we have to buy from many different households. We have perhaps two hundred suppliers for vegetables alone. I don’t even know what the total number is, but I guess it must be three or four thousand.”

There is no main dining room at the Dragon Well Manor. Instead, it has eight private rooms, each with its own terrace, scattered in pavilions around the garden. They are furnished in the spare style of the Ming dynasty, with framed paintings and calligraphy on the walls. The restaurant is almost always fully booked, and each of its two daily seatings—lunch and dinner—can accommodate no more than eighty-eight people. The staff numbers just over a hundred: cooks, waitresses, buyers, administrators, gardeners, and runners to carry the covered dishes from kitchen to dining room. The restaurant has no à la carte menu: customers decide how much they want to spend and let the kitchens send out whatever is good that day.

“We have seventeen cooks,” Dai said. “In a normal restaurant, the same number would be expected to serve more than thirty tables. But although we are expensive by local standards, we are by no means at the top of the range. Our cheapest set menu works out at around three hundred yuan a head”—about forty-five dollars. “If people pay more, we will give them luxuries like the last baby chestnuts of the season. By now, we do manage to cover our running costs and our taxes, but I’ll never recoup my investment. But then I don’t do it for money. I’m content just to feed people who really appreciate what we do.”

Dai’s main worry is that traditional farming and cooking won’t survive another generation. During two weeks that I spent in Hangzhou, in two different seasons, I accompanied him on visits to half a dozen or so rural suppliers, and in almost every household the parents and grandparents were keeping up the family farms, while the children had left for the cities. One fisherman who provides most of the restaurant’s fish and shrimp quipped that his son was more interested in *shang wang*—surfing the Internet—than in *san wang*: casting a fishing net. The oldest supplier is ninety-three years old.

Dai sees himself as a custodian of traditional skills. “My senior chefs are all officially retired workers, but they are teaching the younger chefs how to cook without MSG,” he said. “And when this place was built I made sure that there were younger workers around who could learn from the old master craftsmen." He dreams of one day opening a self-sustaining farm where schoolchildren can learn about the origins of what they eat. "In the past, everyone who grew up in the countryside knew how to raise pigs and fowl, and understood the old agricultural calendar," he said. "But things have developed so quickly, and we are losing touch with our traditions." Still, he is aware of the limitations of his project. "We can only do this on a small scale," he told me as we finished our tea. "China has so many people, and so little land. If everyone tried to eat this way, there wouldn't be enough food to go around. But we must try to sustain our agricultural lore and culinary skills for future generations."

After our exertions in pursuit of wild kiwifruit that day, we returned to our guide Bao Laichun's farmhouse. Dai and I sat at a table in the living room with his chief buyer, Zhou Guofu, who is also his maternal uncle. Bao handed cigarettes to all the men while his wife brought us green tea. It was an old-fashioned mud-brick farmhouse on the brink of a spectacular valley. Silk gourds hung amid yellow blossoms from a vine on the terrace, and water collected in a stone vat fed by a mountain stream. The family's vegetable plot was a patchwork of crops: peanuts and soya, maize and rape. Bao's work foraging for Dai supplements his income as a bamboo transporter. His wife runs a free-range-chicken farm, supplying eggs and birds to the restaurant's kitchens.

"Sourcing our ingredients was a nightmare at first," Zhou said. The buyers spent months driving out to remote villages, meeting farmers, and trying to set up a network of suppliers. They commissioned peasants to rear free-range chickens and ducks, to feed pigs a traditional diet of grain and vegetables, and to sow their fields according to the solar terms of the old agricultural calendar. Through word of mouth, they found people who were prepared to gather wild lily flowers, to catch paddy eels and turtles. "But we were groping in the dark," Zhou said. "And sometimes the peasants deceived us, passing off factory-farmed pork as home-raised meat, or using chemicals on the sly."

According to Dai, even his own buyers were at first so irritated by his stringent demands that they sometimes did their shopping in regular markets. He began to insist on visible proof that they'd really bought from peasant producers—a requirement

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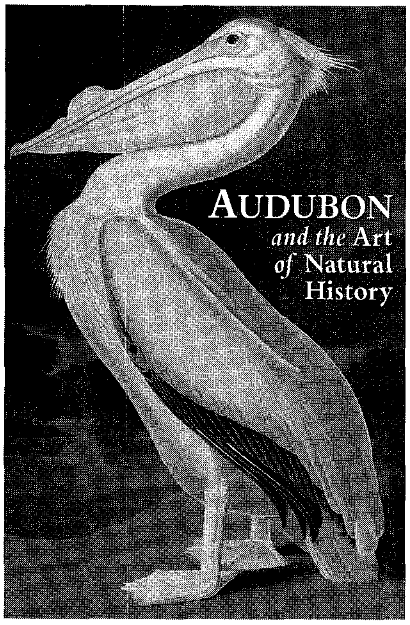

Plate 311, *American White Pelican*, J. J. Audubon
The Birds of America, Havell Edition, 1836

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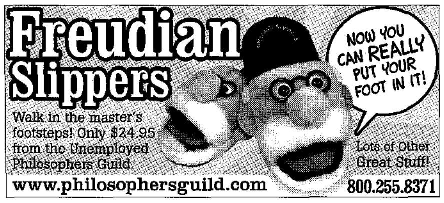

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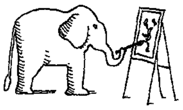

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that eventually gave rise to the photographs and contracts displayed in the restaurant's purchase diary. Gradually, he persuaded his staff to take his project as seriously as he did, and they managed to iron out many of their early problems. "We learned to look for insect bites in our greens, a sign that they were free of pesticides, and to tell the difference between factory-farmed and farm-raised pork," Zhou said, adding that relations with suppliers have become friendly. "We pay them a premium, so they are willing to give us what we want."

We gathered around the table for lunch in the warm sunlight that streamed through the open front door of the farmhouse. Bao's daughter brought out the dishes from the kitchen, one by one. The vegetables were all homegrown or foraged, and cooked in home-pressed rapeseed oil. There was water bamboo, stir-fried on a wood-burning stove with a little sliced pork and a dash of Shaoxing wine; pumpkin leaves with chili and garlic; celery with pressed bean curd; sesame greens, a wild vegetable with an herbal taste; sweet-potato stalks with chili and garlic; silk gourd with pork and chili; and a potful of *guo ba fan*, an old farmhouse favorite of steamed rice with a crisp golden crust.

I complimented our hosts and asked if this was the kind of food they normally ate. They assured me that it was, and Dai hooted with laughter. "What complete rubbish!" he said. "I know perfectly well you wouldn't eat sweet-potato stalks and pumpkin leaves by choice! You're only serving them to humor me." He turned to me. "As far as they are concerned, this is just the stuff they feed to their animals! They are just too polite to say so—they don't want to admit that they are serving pig food to their honored foreign guest." He turned to Bao and his wife and asked, "Isn't that true?"

The couple smiled with embarrassment and admitted that this was so. Everyone laughed. And later that afternoon, when we arrived at our next stop, to inspect a pig due for slaughter later in the week, the lady of the house was sitting on the kitchen floor, chopping up sweet-potato stalks for the doomed animal's dinner.

On another day, I went to visit the Dragon Well Manor's head chef, Dong Jinmu, a gruff-voiced man with thick eyebrows and a dry sense of humor. He began by giving me a tour of the kitchens. We watched two elderly brothers grind soybeans in a hand-turned mill, and then boil the soy milk in a wok over an old-fashioned wood-burning stove. According to Dong, when Dai opened the restaurant, he persuaded the men to move their entire village bean-curd workshop into his garden. Now they make fresh soy milk and bean curd every day. Dong himself had a hand in building their stove. "We sacrificed a large cockerel in the traditional way, cutting its head off and splashing blood over the site," he told me.

It was early in the morning, and in the main kitchen younger chefs were cutting up vegetables and butchering pork. On either side, there were smaller rooms: one for making cold dishes, one for soups and stews, another for pressing fruit juices. In a prep room, shelves were stacked with entire Jinhua hams, as well as with huge winter melons, pumpkins, and an assortment of vegetables. Dried bamboo shoots soaked in a large basin on the floor. A little farther away, in an outbuilding open to the yard, several women were plucking and cleaning chickens.

Before coming to Dragon Well, Chef Dong worked for forty years at Louwailou, Hangzhou's most famous restaurant. Dai approached him after his retirement, realizing that he would be a repository of disappearing recipes and skills, and also recruited two other retired chefs, Guo Ming and Yang Aiping. But even these three initially struggled with Dai's rigorous approach to traditional methods. Dong thought that dispensing with MSG would be commercially disastrous, but Dai insisted, and Chef Dong started once again to make the rich stocks that his old *shifu* (master chef) had taught him during his apprentice years, in the nineteen-sixties.

As the lunchtime service started, Dong and Guo went to their wok stations. Guo was making soups and stir-fries that included peasant dishes like scrambled eggs with chives, while Dong took charge of red-braised dishes and banquet delicacies. "Taste a bit of this," he said, handing me a sample of golden liquid from a bowl at his side. It was an elixir of dried scallops and chicken, their flavors marvellously distilled, that he uses to enhance and enrich his soups and sauces. And then he offered me a taste of a sauce in a simmering potful of red-braised fish tails, an astonishing wine-dark liquid. This is what people mean, I thought, when they say "depth of flavor." The taste was like gazing into a deep, ancient pool.

In the early evening, I joined one of the restaurant's reception staff, Qian Lu, on a terrace overlooking a pond, and we lay back on bamboo seats, sipping Dragon Well tea and eating nuts and dried fruits. Boulders had been strewn here and there with artful artlessness, and lotus leaves tilted drowsily in the water. At dusk, a woman had begun to play the guzheng, a large zither, under a canopy on a little island in the pond. The low hills of Longjing rose all around. Listening to the music, gazing out over the pond, and chatting with Qian Lu, who was wearing a pale silk *qi pao* embroidered with flowers, I felt that I had been transported into the world of the great eighteenth-century novel "Dream of the Red Chamber," whose author, Cao Xueqin, was from the Lower Yangtze Region. Then Qian Lu took a call from Dai on her wristwatch cell phone. "These *qi pao* don't have pockets, so we can't carry normal cell phones," she said.

At dinnertime, we joined Dai, his uncle Zhou, and some friends in one of the private dining rooms, a hall with wooden pillars supporting raftered ceilings. A large round table in the center of the room was laid with fine blue-and-white china, made to order in China's ancient porcelain capital, Jingdezhen.

A waitress served us fresh warm soy milk, seasoned with soy sauce, preserved mustard tuber, pieces of deep-fried dough stick, paper-thin dried shrimp, and chopped scallion. It was the kind of dish that makes a Hangzhou person sigh. It's rare, nowadays, to find such stone-ground soy milk. Even in the villages, people have discarded their old stone querns and use electric mills instead.

The meal began with a selection of appetizers: crisp young ginger, pickled in a sweet-sour marinade; slices of pressed bean curd made by the elderly brothers and bathed in a luxurious stock; the wild sesame greens we'd shared with Farmer Bao; tiny cucumbers, picked that morning, with a dip of sweet fermented sauce; crunchy jellyfish with local rice vinegar. Waitresses in *qi pao* and pearls poured us glasses of freshly pressed juice: yellow peach and wild kiwi, from the fruit we'd helped to gather.

There were echoes of dishes I had tasted at the restaurant earlier in the year, but much was different. Loquats, whose juice we had drunk in May, were no longer available, and the season for wild shrimp was past. And at the end of this, my second stay in Hangzhou, I realized that I really had seen the origins of much of what I ate. Our first main course was a stir-fry of tender chicken with tiny chestnuts, so young they were still crisp and yellow: visiting the farm where the chicken had been raised, I had been scratched by the bristles of wild chestnuts. There was red-braised belly pork with dried bamboo shoots, the meat as dark as molasses and so soft you could sink a chopstick into the flesh: I had heard the shrieks of the pig, seen its throat slit and its blood thunder into a basin, and tasted its flesh, poached in water, barely half an hour later. And in the fragrance of the dish was the memory of a Shaoxing wine factory where I had wandered among the stacked wine jars, sealed with lotus leaves and clay.

A waitress entered and laid a soup tureen on the table. She announced the dish as *wu ming ying xiong*—"nameless heroes." Steam rose from a milky broth, in which a carp rested in the silky folds of bamboo-pith fungus. Scarlet wolfberries and sliced scallion were scattered on top, like jewels on pale flesh. The waitress ladled the soup into small bowls, each with a piece of fish and a lacy morsel of fungus. The liquid was *xian*, richly savory, replete with delicious fish flavors, and yet the fish itself was not overcooked. Dai explained that this was a *gongfu cai*, an "art" dish, whose elaborate preparation was invisible in the simplicity of its final appearance. Small crucian carp were used for the broth, simmered for their flavor and then discarded. The whole carp in front of us had been poached, briefly, in their stock. "So you see," Dai said, "the vanished crucian carp are the dish's 'nameless heroes.'"

After the meal was over, I walked back through the garden, to the gate where Zhou, the buyer, was waiting to take me home. Fragments of conversation and laughter drifted from hidden terraces, and a few lights shone among the trees. I wandered over the stone bridges, through the shadows of willow and winter plum. Osmanthus trees were in bloom, and the night air was filled with their honeyed fragrance. ♦

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THE PLAN

BY JACK HANDEY

The plan isn't foolproof. For it to work, certain things must happen:

—The door to the vault must have accidentally been left open by the cleaning woman.

—The guard must bend over to tie his shoes and somehow he gets all the shoelaces tied together. He can't get them apart, so he takes out his gun and shoots all his bullets at the knot. But he misses. Then he just lies down on the floor and goes to sleep.

—Most of the customers in the bank must happen to be wearing Nixon masks, so when we come in wearing our Nixon masks it doesn't alarm anyone.

—There must be an empty parking space right out in front. If it has a meter, there must be time left on it, because our outfits don't have pockets for change.

—The monkeys must grab the bags of money and not just shriek and go running all over the place, like they did in the practice run.

—The security cameras must be the early, old-timey kind that don't actually take pictures.

—When the big clock in the lobby strikes two, everyone must stop and stare at it for at least ten minutes.

—The bank alarm must have mistakenly been set to "Quiet." Or "Ebb tide."

—The gold bars must be made out of a lighter kind of gold that's just as valuable but easier to carry.

—If somebody runs out of the bank and yells, "Help! The bank is being robbed!," he must be a neighborhood crazy person who people just laugh at.

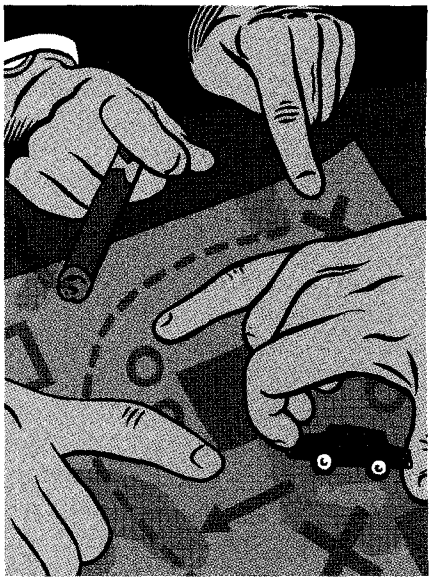
—If the police come, they don't notice that the historical mural on the wall is actually us, holding still.

—The bank's lost-and-found department must have a gun that fires a suction cup with a wire attached to it. Also a chainsaw and a hang glider.

—When we spray the lobby with knockout gas, for some reason the gas doesn't work on us.

—After the suction cup is stuck to the ceiling, it must hold long enough for Leon to pull himself up the wire while carrying the bags of money, the gold bars, and the hang glider. When he reaches the ceiling, he must be able to cut through it with the chainsaw and climb out.

—Any fingerprints we leave must be erased by the monkeys.



—Once on the roof, Leon must be able to hold on to the hang glider with one hand and the money and the gold bars with the other and launch himself off the roof. Then glide the twenty miles to the rendezvous point.

—When we exit the bank, there must be a parade going by, so our getaway car, which is decorated to look like a float, can blend right in.

—During the parade, our car must not win a prize for best float, because then we'll have to have our picture taken with the award.

—At the rendezvous point, there must be an empty parking space with a meter that takes hundred-dollar bills.

—The robbery is blamed on the monkeys. ♦

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

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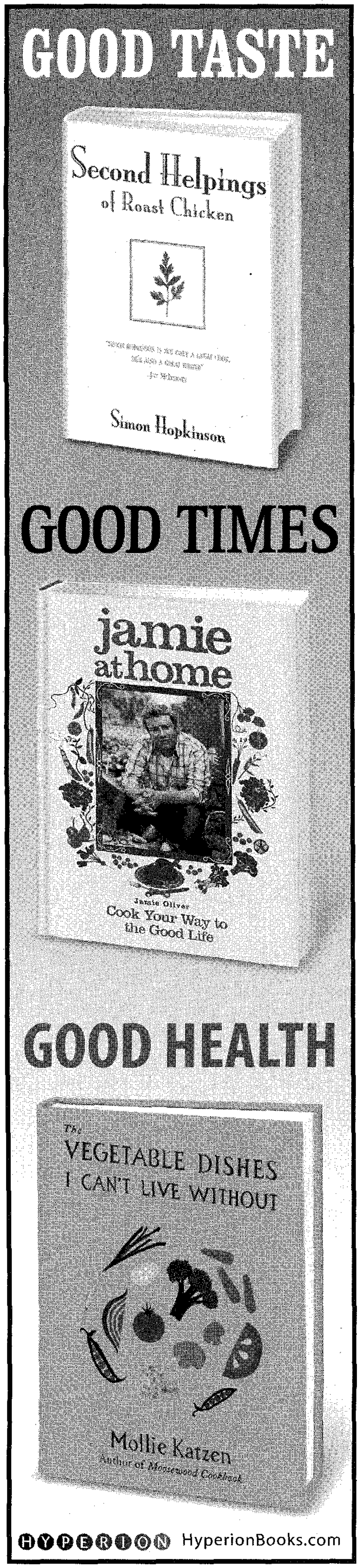
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BY MEAT ALONE

The best Texas BBQ in the world.

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

I approached *Texas Monthly's* cover story on "The Top 50 BBQ Joints in Texas" this summer the way a regular reader of *People* might approach that magazine's annual "Sexiest Man Alive" feature—with the expectation of seeing some familiar names. There was no reason to think that the list's top tier—the five restaurants judged to be the best in the state—would look much different than it had the last time a survey was published, in 2003. In recent years, Hollywood may have seen some advances in physical training and cosmetic surgery, but barbecue restaurants still tend to retain their lustre much longer than male heartthrobs do. In fact, I've heard it argued that, absent some slippage in management, a barbecue restaurant can only get better over time: many Texas barbecue fanatics have a strong belief in the beneficial properties of accumulated grease.

In discussions of Texas barbecue, the equivalent of Matt Damon and George Clooney and Brad Pitt would be establishments like Kreuz Market and Smitty's Market, in Lockhart; City Market, in Luling; and Louie Mueller Barbecue, in Taylor—places that reflect the barbecue tradition that developed during the nineteenth century out of German and Czech meat markets in the Hill Country of central Texas. (In fact, the title of *Texas Monthly's* first article on barbecue—it was published in 1973, shortly after the magazine's founding—was "The World's Best Barbecue Is in Taylor, Texas. Or Is It Lockhart?") Those restaurants, all of which had been in the top tier in 2003, were indeed there again in this summer's survey. For the first time, though, a No. 1 had been named, and it was not one of the old familiars. "The best barbecue in Texas," the article said, "is currently being served at Snow's BBQ, in Lexington."

I had never heard of Snow's. That surprised me. Although I grew up in Kansas City, which has a completely different style of barbecue, I have always kept more or less au courant of Texas barbecue, like a sports fan who is almost monomaniacally obsessed with basketball but glances over at the N.H.L. standings now and then just to see how things are going. Reading that the best barbecue in Texas was at Snow's, in Lexington, I felt like a *People* subscriber who had picked up the "Sexiest Man Alive" issue and discovered that the sexiest man alive was Sheldon Ludnick, an insurance adjuster from Terre Haute, Indiana, with Clooney as the runner-up.

An accompanying story on how a Numero Uno had emerged, from three hundred and forty-one spots visited by the staff, revealed that before work began on the 2008 survey nobody at *Texas Monthly* had heard of Snow's, either. Lexington, a trading town of twelve hundred people in Lee County, is only about fifty miles from Austin, where *Texas Monthly* is published, and Texans think nothing of driving that far for lunch—particularly if the lunch consists of brisket that has been subjected to slow heat since the early hours of the morning. *Texas Monthly* has had a strong posse of barbecue enthusiasts since its early days. Griffin Smith, who wrote the 1973 barbecue article and is now the executive editor of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, in Little Rock, was known for keeping a map of the state on his wall with push-pins marking barbecue joints he had been to, the way General Patton might have kept a map marked with spots where night patrols had probed the German line. I could imagine the staffers not knowing about a superior barbecue restaurant in East Texas; the Southern style of barbecue served there, often on a bun, has never held much interest for Austin connoisseurs. But their being unaware of a top-tier establishment less than an hour's drive away astonished me.

I know some of the *Texas Monthly* crowd. In fact, I once joined Greg Curtis, the former editor, and Steve Harrigan, a novelist who's had a long association with the magazine, on a pilgrimage to Lockhart, which some barbecue fans visit the way the devout of another sort walk the Camino de Santiago. I know Evan Smith, who was the editor of the magazine when this latest barbecue survey was published and has since been promoted to a position that might be described as boss of bosses. I couldn't imagine Smith jiggering the results for nefarious purposes—say, telling his staff to declare a totally unknown barbecue place the best in Texas simply as a way of doing what some magazine editors call "juicing up the story." I took him at his word when, a few months after the list was published, he told me how Snow's had been found. His staff had gone through the letters written after the 2003 survey complaining about the neglect of a superior specialist in pork ribs or the inclusion of a place whose smoked sausage wasn't fit for pets—what Smith, who's from Queens, refers to as "Dear Schmuck letters."

He did acknowledge that his decision to name a No. 1—rather than just a top tier, as in the previous barbecue surveys—came about partly because everyone was so enthusiastic about Snow's product but partly because its story was so compelling. Smith himself was not in a position to confirm the quality of the product. Being from Queens is not the only handicap he has had to surmount in his rise through the ranks of Texas journalism: he has been a vegetarian for nearly twenty-five years. (The fact that he is able to resist the temptation presented by the aroma of Texas pit barbecue, he has said, is a strong indication that he will never "return to the dark side.") As a longtime editor, though, he knew a Cinderella story when he saw one. It wasn't just that Snow's had been unknown to a Texas barbecue fancy that is notably mobile. Snow's proprietor, Kerry Bexley, was a former rodeo clown who worked as a blending-facility operator at a coal mine. Snow's pit master, Tootsie Tomanetz, was a woman in her early seventies who worked as the custodian of the middle school in Giddings, Texas—the Lee County seat, eighteen miles to the south. After five years of operating Snow's, both of them still had their day jobs. Also, Snow's was open only on Saturday mornings, from eight until the meat ran out.

At Snow's, the pit master, Tootsie Tomanetz, prepares her meat hours before the place opens. Photographs by Brian Finke.

My conversation with Evan Smith took place in a Chevrolet Suburban travelling from Austin toward Lexington. I'd been picked up at my hotel at 7:20 A.M. The *Texas Monthly* rankings had attracted large crowds to Snow's, and, even four months later, we weren't taking any chances. Greg Curtis and Steve Harrigan were with Smith in the back seats. Harrigan was one of the people who, having been tipped off between the time the feature was completed and the time the magazine came out, hurried over to Snow's like inside traders in possession of material information not available to the general public. He seemed completely unrepentant. "I took my brother and brother-in-law and son-in-law and nephew," he said, smiling slyly. Next to me in the front seat, Paul Burka was doing the driving. Greg Curtis once reminded me that "all barbecue experts are self-proclaimed," but *Texas Monthly* had enough faith in Burka's expertise to send him to Snow's late in the selection process as what Smith calls "the closer." It was up to Burka to confirm or dismiss the judgment of the staffer whose assigned territory for the survey included Lexington, and of Patricia Sharpe, the editor in charge of the project, and of a second staffer sent in as a triple-check. Some people at the magazine had predicted that Burka wouldn't like Snow's barbecue simply because it bore Pat Sharpe's imprimatur. "Paul thinks Pat's judgment of restaurants is fancy and white tablecloth and Pat thinks Paul is a philistine," I heard from the back seat. "And they're both right."

When I spoke to Pat Sharpe a couple of days later, she bristled at the accusation that she is a person of elevated taste. "I'll eat barbecue in the rattiest joint there is," she said in her own defense.

Burka, on the other hand, seemed unconcerned about being called a philistine. He is a large man with a white mustache and a midsection that reflects a forty-year interest in Texas barbecue. Having grown up in Galveston, which is not a barbecue center, he innocently started eating what he now describes as "'barbecue' that was one step removed from roast beef" while he was a student at Rice, in Houston; he had his true conversion experience on a trip to Lockhart with Griffin Smith in 1967, when they were both in law school at the University of Texas. Burka, who worked for five years in the Texas state legislature, writes about politics for *Texas Monthly*. Speaking to him as the Suburban rolled toward Lexington, I was reminded of the Austin brought to life in "The Gay Place," Billy Lee Brammer's marvellous 1961 novel about an L.B.J.-like governor called Arthur (Goddam) Fenstermaker. That Austin was essentially a two-company town—the university and the state government—and I always pictured those connected with both companies sharing irreverent observations of the passing scene while consuming a lot of beer in the back of Scholz's beer garden. It is an Austin that is sometimes difficult to discern in a much larger city of slick office buildings and computer-company headquarters and the mother church of Whole Foods, which actually offers barbecue in the meat department of its Austin stores. ("Organic barbecue," Burka muttered, when somebody brought that up.)

The first time Burka went to Lexington to check out Snow's, he arrived just before noon. "It looked like it had never been open," he said. "It was deserted." When he finally got there at a time when meat was still available, he was convinced. In fact, he was rhapsodic, particularly concerning the brisket ("as soft and sweet as cookie dough") and the pork butt. Smith believed that Burka's description of the latter—"the butt was tender and yielding"—was in need of some editing, but, without having to consume any critters personally, he was persuaded by Burka's report. Snow's was to be named the best barbecue in Texas, and Evan Smith never had any doubt about what would happen as soon as that designation was on the newsstands. "I basically said, 'Congratulations and I'm sorry,' " he told me, "because I knew what would happen."

"That brings up the subject of remorse," I said.

"You mean remorse on their part?" Smith asked.

"No, remorse on your part—remorse for having turned the place into an ugly scene."

"We don't publish *Best-Kept Secrets Monthly*," Smith said, as he got out of Burka's Suburban. He sniffed confidently, presumably to reassure himself that, despite the aroma, he would have no trouble limiting himself to coleslaw and potato salad. Then he marched across the street toward Snow's BBQ.

"And then Joel didn't come in today, so I had to do all his pillaging."

Regular consumers of Hill Country-style Texas barbecue know what to expect when they walk into an establishment that is said to offer the real article. I had never been to Louie Mueller's, in Taylor, before this trip, but when Greg Curtis and I went there the day before the Snow's outing for what we referred to as some warmup barbecue, the place looked familiar. At a Texas barbecue joint, you normally pick up a tray at the counter and order meat from one person and sides from another. The person doling out the meat removes it from the smoker and carves it himself. It is sold by the pound—often brisket and pork ribs and sausage and beef ribs and chicken and, in some places, clod (beef shoulder). The carver serves it on some variety of butcher paper. If, despite having worked with smoke in his eyes for many years, he is of a generous nature, as the carvers at Mueller's are known to be, he might slice off a piece of a brisket's darkened outside—what would be called in Kansas City a burnt end—and, before you've ordered anything, place it on your tray as a small gesture. (Given the quality of Mueller's brisket, it is a gesture that can make a traveller feel immensely pleased about being back in Texas.) A couple of slices of packaged white bread are also included. Usually, the only way to have a brisket sandwich in central Texas is to make your own.

A Texas barbecue joint is likely to have neon beer signs on the walls, and those walls are likely to have been darkened by years of smoke. At Mueller's, a cavernous place in a former school gym, there is a large bulletin board festooned with business cards, and most of the cards by now look like specks of brownish parchment. In a restaurant serving Hill Country barbecue, there may be bottles of sauce on the tables, but the meat does not come out of the pits slathered in sauce. I remember a sign at Kreuz Market announcing that the management provided neither sauce nor salads nor forks. In central Texas, you don't hear a lot of people talking about the piquancy of a restaurant's sauce or the tastiness of its beans; discussions are what a scholar of the culture might call meat-driven.

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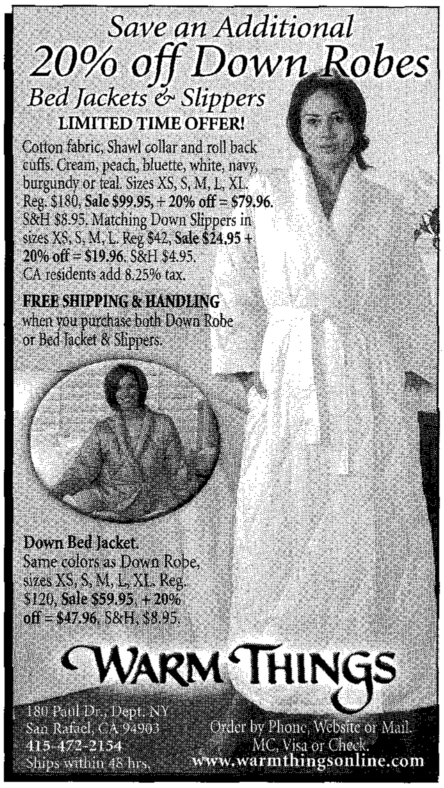

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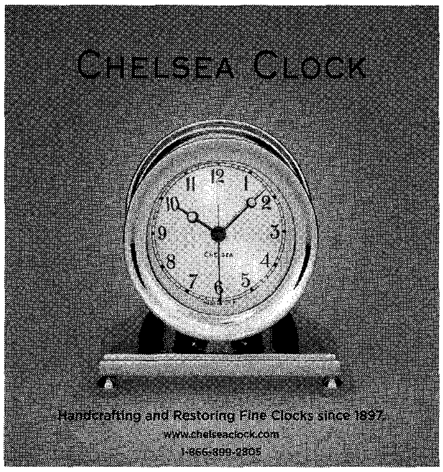

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the Hill Country—it's in ranch land, northeast of Austin—but ethnically it is. Burka told me that a politician from Lee County once said to him, "It's the Germans against the Czechs, and the Americans are the swing vote." Snow's BBQ turned out to have the sort of layout found in a place like Kreuz Market, except in miniature. It's a small dark-red building that has room for a counter and six tables—with a few more tables outside, near the cast-iron smokers that in Texas are referred to as pits, even if they're not in the ground. A sign listed what meats were available, all for $8.45 a pound: sausage, brisket, pork, pork ribs, and chicken. The sides offered were "Mrs. Patschke's homemade coleslaw and potato salad," plus free beans. There were only a couple of people ahead of us in line. Burka stepped up to the counter to order.

"Are there five of you?" the young woman slicing the meat asked, as Burka tried to figure out how many pounds we needed.

"Well," Burka said, glancing at Evan Smith. "Four, really. One is . . . he has a big meal coming up."

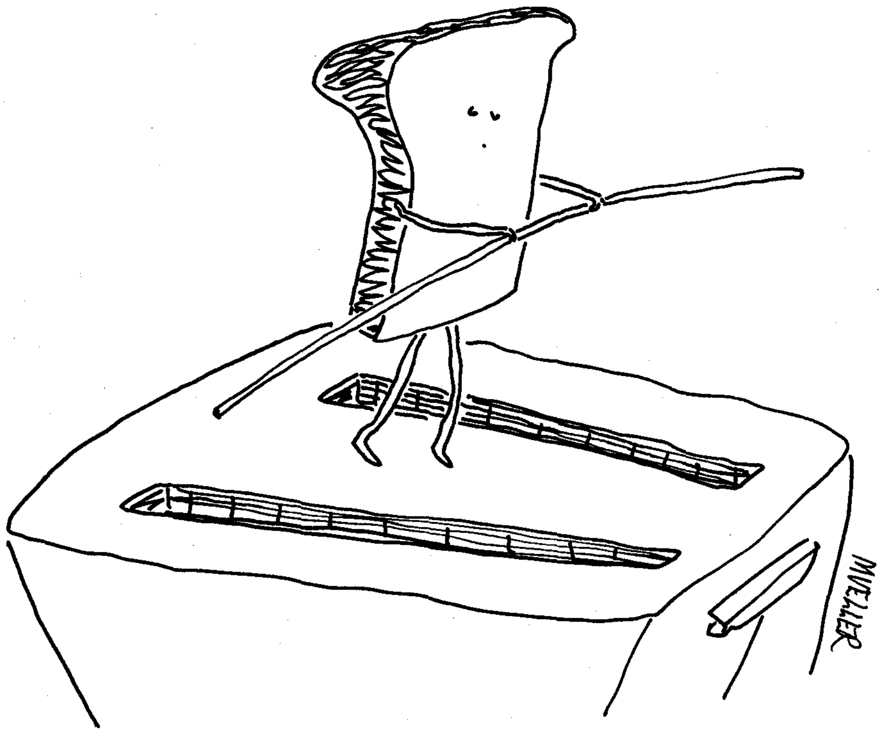
"You're ashamed of your friend," I whispered to Burka. "You've abandoned him."

"I just couldn't say the V-word," Burka said. He looked sheepish—not, I would guess, a normal look for him.

I had warned the *Texas Monthly* crowd that if they were looking for confirmation of their ranking by an objective outlander, someone from Kansas City was not likely to provide it. A jazz fan taken to a rock concert might admire the musical technique, but he probably wouldn't make an ecstatic rush to the stage. As we sat down at one of the outside tables, under a galvanized-tin covering, I told them that they could expect the sort of response that a proud young father I know has received during the past year or so whenever he e-mails me pictures of his firstborn: "A perfectly adequate child." Still, what Burka had ordered was good enough to make me forget that we were eating a huge meal of barbecue at a time on Saturday morning when most people were starting to wonder what they might rustle up for breakfast once they bestirred themselves. I particularly liked the brisket, although I couldn't attest that it was as soft and sweet as cookie dough. In Kansas City, it is not customary to eat cookie dough.

Although Snow's hours may seem odd to a city dweller, they seem normal in Lexington. Saturday is traditionally when farmers and ranchers from the surrounding area come into town, and at twelve-thirty every Saturday there is a cattle auction in yards that are just down the street from Snow's. From 1976 to 1996, in fact, Tootsie Tomanetz, who is known far and wide in Lee County as Miss Tootsie, served barbecue every Saturday at a meat market that she and her husband ran in Lexington. Miss Tootsie's husband is half Czech and half German. She was born Norma Frances Otto, German on both sides, and her father liked to say that when she married she went from having a last name that could be spelled backward or forward to having one that couldn't be spelled at all. Before the Tomanetzes opened their store, Miss Tootsie had put in ten years tending the pits at City Meat Market, in Giddings. In other words, Kerry Bexley, who's forty-one, could have a certainty about Miss Tootsie's gift that was based on having eaten her barbecue virtually all his life.

After lunch, if that's what you call a large meal of meat that you finish just before 9 A.M., I had a chat about Snow's origins with its management team. We talked near the pits, so Miss Tootsie could pull off sausage links now and then. "I felt like with her name and barbecue and my personality with people we could make it work," Bexley told me. He's a short, outgoing man whose résumé includes—in addition to rodeo clown—prison guard, auctioneer, real-estate agent, and shopkeeper. He already had the location—a place where he'd run a farm and ranch store in 1992. The name came from a nickname he'd had since before he was born. According to the family story, his brother, then four years old, was asked whether he was hoping for the new baby to be a boy or a girl, and he replied, not unreasonably, that he would prefer a snowman. Kerry (Snowman) Bexley and Miss Tootsie opened Snow's in March of 2003—Bexley had built the pits—and it did well from the start. "For the most part, we cooked two to three hundred pounds of meat," Bexley told me. "We sold out by noon."



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In the weeks after the *Texas Monthly* feature was published, Snow's went from serving three hundred pounds of meat every Saturday to serving more than a thousand pounds. At eight in the morning—six or seven hours after Miss Tootsie had arrived to begin tending the pits—there was already a line of customers, some of whom had left home before dawn. Bexley said that one Saturday morning, when there were ninety people waiting outside, a local resident asked permission to gather signatures along the line for a petition, only to return a few minutes later with the information that there wasn't one person there from Lee County. Some locals expressed irritation at being shut out of their own barbecue joint. At times, Bexley and Miss Tootsie felt overwhelmed. There were moments, they say, when they wished that the tasters from *Texas Monthly* had never shown up. Then Bexley added three brisket pits, Miss Tootsie got some help, Snow's for a time quit taking pre-orders by phone except for locals, and the amount of meat prepared every Saturday levelled off to about eight hundred pounds.

Most of the time, Bexley and Miss Tootsie are grateful for the additional business. Not long after the survey appeared, Snow's BBQ started selling T-shirts that had on them not only "Voted #1 BBQ in Texas" but a motto that Bexley's wife had suggested—"Smokin' the good stuff." Looking around for a way to extend the newly famous Snow's brand without sacrificing the quality of the product, Bexley has hit on mail order, and is hoping to have that under way soon. Snow's already has a Web site. Bexley and Miss Tootsie are also pleased by the personal recognition. They've worked hard. Most people in Lee County work hard without anybody's noticing. Whether or not Kerry Bexley and Tootsie Tomanetz ever feel able to give up their day jobs, they have received the sort of pure validation that doesn't come to many people, no matter what their field of endeavor.

"Miss Tootsie gets some recognition now for what she's actually done all her life," Bexley said. "She's now"—he turned to Miss Tootsie—"seventy-four? Excuse me for asking."

"No, I'm just seventy-three," Miss Tootsie said, smiling. "You add a year every time."

"What did you do when you heard that you were No. 1?" I asked.

"When we found out we were No. 1," Bexley said, "we just set there in each other's arms and we bawled." ♦

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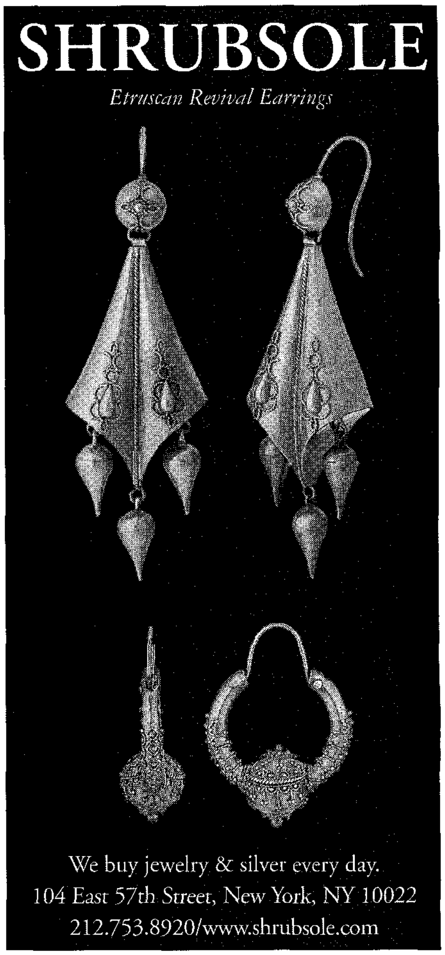
Calvin Trillin answers readers' questions.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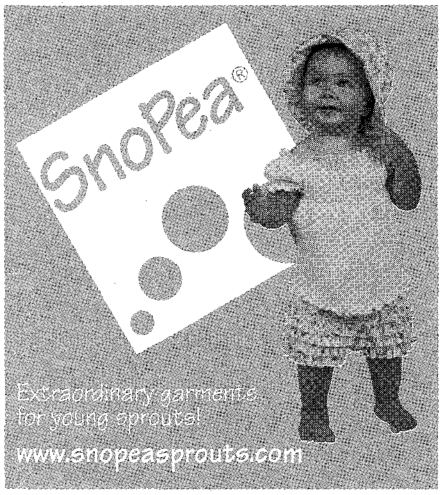
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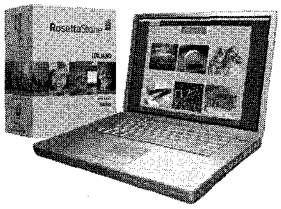

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SHARPER

Bob Kramer and the secret lives of knives.

BY TODD OPPENHEIMER

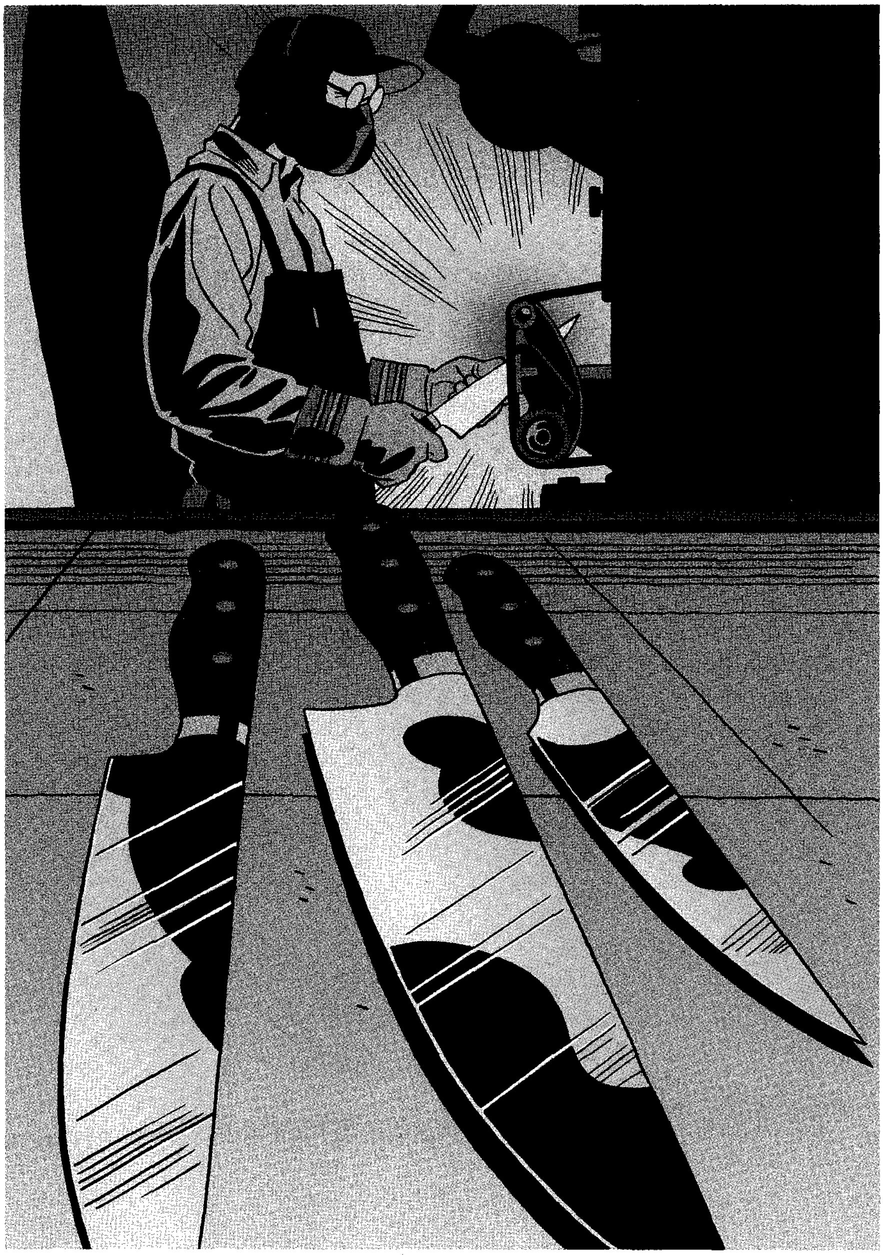
Bob Kramer is one of a hundred and twenty-two people in the world, and the only former chef, to have been certified in the United States as a Master Bladesmith. To earn that title, which is conferred by the American Bladesmith Society, Kramer underwent five years of study, culminating in the manufacture, through hand-forging, of six knives. One of those was a roughly finished, fifteen-inch bowie knife, which Kramer had to use to accomplish four tasks, in this order: cut through an inch-thick piece of Manila rope in a single swipe; chop through a two-by-four, twice; place the blade on his forearm and, with the belly of the blade that had done all the chopping, shave a swath of arm hair; and, finally, lock the knife in a vise and permanently bend it ninety degrees. The combination of these challenges tests steel's two chief but conflicting capabilities: its flexibility and its hardness.

Despite attaining a master's status, Kramer remains in awe of steel's unsolved mysteries. Like a mad alchemist, he cannot stop tinkering with steel recipes, forging together different metal blocks and powders to ennoble iron with just the right amount of nickel, manganese, or some other selection of chemistry's basic elements. The amalgams continue to respond in ways that baffle the most experienced metallurgists. Even so, he has not done badly. One morning, the no-nonsense culinary magazine *Cook's Illustrated* called his shop, in Olympia, Washington, and ordered one of his knives to include in an equipment-rating article. Kramer worked into the night for three days, and then shipped off an eight-inch chef's knife. When the magazine's story ran, last year, it included a small sidebar asking whether such a seemingly straightforward knife could be worth its exorbitant cost (four hundred and seventy-five dollars, at the time). The editors' answer: "Yes. The Kramer knife outperformed every knife we've ever rated." Kramer's backlog of orders, already long, immediately jumped to two years. A few months later, the kitchen-supply chain Sur La Table asked Kramer to design a commercial line of knives, which the store introduced this fall. As he prepared for his mass-market début, Kramer made a series of trips, including a few to Japan, the High Church of steelmaking, where his commercial knives are being manufactured. Kramer's itineraries matched the way he lives: a restless, almost insatiable search for essences, for the soul of craftsmanship, for perfection in a household tool.

Most bladesmiths come out of the ranchlands and hunting hollows of rural America, and they look, speak, and dress like throwbacks to the days of the covered wagon. By contrast, Kramer—who has been not only a chef but also a waiter, a folk-art importer, an improvisational-theatre performer, and, for a year in his twenties, a Ringling Brothers clown—arrives at knife shows looking like a Silicon Valley entrepreneur: button-down silk shirts, neatly pressed slacks, a thin goatee on a sharp face. Now fifty, and a trim five feet ten, Kramer is upbeat and alert, and he moves fast. Talking to him can be like playing with a dog; his face seems to be constantly on the lookout for fun. He is almost allergic to advance planning. One morning in 1997, when he was refining the design for his chef's knife, a passerby, stunned by the sight of a blacksmith's shop in downtown Seattle (Kramer moved to Olympia in 2005), popped in and started badgering him with ideas. Rather than drive the visitor away, Kramer listened to him. It turned out that the man was a sailor, and he was adamant that the shape of Kramer's blade should match the lines of a Six-Metre sloop—a curve, he argued, that holds universal value. That line remains one of the hallmarks of a Kramer knife.

Earlier this year, when Kramer took me inside his shop (a quintessential prefab industrial cavern), he explained why he's no longer a chef: "I decided I wanted to make something that lasted longer than a meal." Tools, thick leather aprons and gloves, dusty old swords, and strips of steel in various stages of knifeness were strewn everywhere. Stacked along one wall were approximately a hundred plates (six feet long, two feet wide, a quarter inch thick) of Kramer's favorite grade of steel. The pile would last three to four years, since Kramer makes an average of only five knives a week. (Most knife factories, even small ones, make that many in an hour.) Surrounding the steel was a cornucopia of metal in various forms: bars and rods of assorted lengths, thicknesses, and grades; bags of specialized powders; and a scattering of power tools that hammer, cut, or squeeze.

During my visit, Kramer was absorbed in one of his incessant studies—this time, an attempt to replicate the legendary achievements of Frank J. Richtig. In 1936, Richtig, a Nebraska blacksmith, made "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" for an act that he performed at state and county fairs: according to "Ripley's," this was a man who "cuts cold steel... auto parts, railroad spikes, buggy axles, etc., with a butcher knife, and then cuts paper with the same knife!" (Cutting paper may not sound like much, but it's a surprisingly demanding test of blade sharpness which is still in use, even in modern factories.) Richtig supposedly had a special system for heat-treating his blades, which he never revealed. To this day, scholarly papers occasionally appear in the annals of metallurgy which attempt to uncover Richtig's methods. "I would *love* to crack this," Kramer told me. "If I could do that, game over. I win!"



Any decent knife can be made sharp; its "edge geometry" is the key to how it will cut.

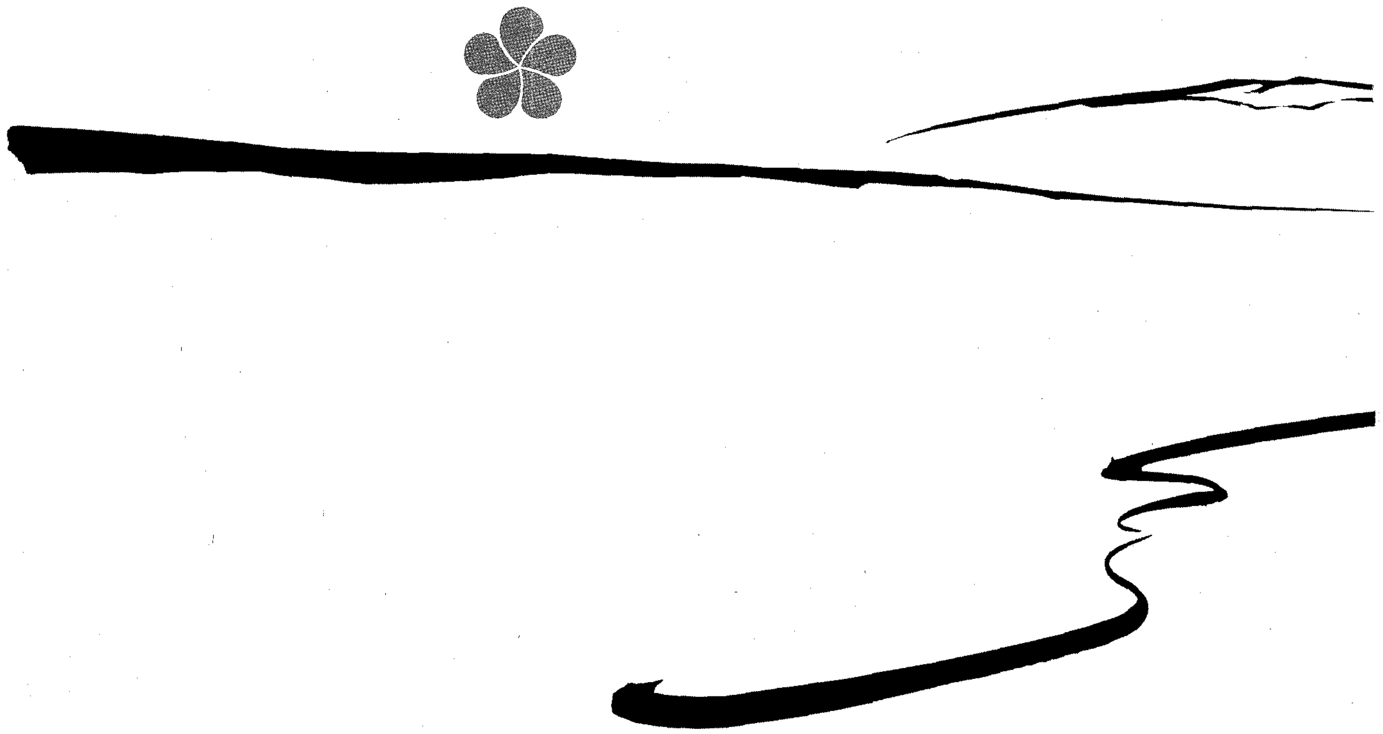
JAIME HERNANDEZ

Kramer began his Richtig experiment the way he makes his standard custom knives: he ran a steel plate through a band saw, cutting out several knife-shaped chunks, and then, with a pair of tongs, laid one on a brick in his forge—a two-foot-square, gas-fired kiln. Kramer normally uses a pyrometer to tell him when a blade has reached its critical temperature. But on this particular day the gauge was on the blink, so he had to work the way that Richtig and centuries of samurai swordsmen before him did: by eye. Visual acuity is paramount in bladesmithing, because slight temperature variances can mean the difference between a blade that's tough and another that's brittle. Within two minutes, this blade was a glowing orange, just shy of fifteen hundred degrees. Kramer picked up his tongs, removed the blade, and dropped it on the floor to cool. (The standard blacksmithing image has the smith beating the blade with a hammer at this point; while many still do this, to eliminate bubbles and the like, it's seldom necessary with today's industrially rolled steel.) After ten minutes, when the blade was cool enough to handle, Kramer gave it a quick, blunt edge on a grinding wheel. Then he wrapped a wire around its handle end and dangled it in a series of containers full of molten salt. The first of these baths, which sets the steel up for hardening, simmers near forging temperatures. The last, a luxurious two-hour soak that matches the baking levels of a household oven, lets the steel relax; as the atoms inside the steel gradually migrate away from one another, they settle into roomy corners free of pressure from their neighbors. This is the "tempering" stage, the final step that keeps a blade from being fragile. (Sometimes—depending on the grade of steel, and the hardness levels that Kramer is after—a knife will, before tempering, take a dip in a warm bucket of oil, or another full of dry ice and acetone.) After lunch, Kramer pulled the blade from its final salt bath and hung it on a wire rack to cool. Ten minutes later, he was standing in his sharpening room, slowly rocking the knife against a series of sandpaper belt grinders, coarse- and fine-grit wheels, and, finally, a soft cotton wheel coated with a waxy green polishing compound. Kramer now asked me to lay a long bolt across his anvil. He picked up the newly forged knife, held it on top of the bolt, reached for a heavy forging hammer, and started banging away. The bolt gave, but so did the knife. Damage to bolt: a quarter-inch cut. Damage to knife: a sixteenth-inch chip.

Kramer studied the pile of broken metal in his hand and looked up, amused. "Well, we know that's not it." He then repeated the process with a second blade—heating and cooling it at a different series of temperatures—but this time he tried an old trick: when sharpening the blade, he gave it a "beefy" edge, grinding it to a relatively wide V. Kramer took this route reluctantly, knowing that it might draw scorn. Sharpness, it turns out, is a surprisingly complex and contentious notion. Any decent knife can be made sharp at its cutting edge; what matters is the shape of the steel behind it—what cutlery experts call "edge geometry." A blade that is ground, for instance, with wide, heavily angled geometry won't move through fish or a tomato as smoothly as a thin, tapered edge can, but it will murder chicken bones; and so, Kramer figured, it ought to do a job on a bolt. This time, the bolt split and left only a slight mark on the blade's edge. Kramer's eyes widened: "I think I just did it! Let's do that again—that was fun!" Another whack, more success; but when it came to the final test—cutting newspaper—the knife failed. Kramer again examined his blade. "I'm still in the dark," he said.

At dinner one night, while biting into a piece of tuna at a well-regarded sushi restaurant, Kramer suddenly stiffened. "Did you hear that?" he asked. Kramer was sitting a good twenty feet from the kitchen, with his back to the chef, but he immediately recognized the faint sound of steel against steel, as the chef took a moment to work his knife over a metal rod called a honing or sharpening steel. "That was *really* weird," Kramer said. Professional chefs, especially sushi chefs, typically sharpen their knives at the beginning of the night's work or at the end—almost never during mealtime. Moreover, sharpening steels are meant for European, or "Western," cutlery, not Japanese. Either this chef, an elderly Japanese man, did not know how to use his own cutlery (which was unlikely) or he wasn't using a sushi knife. After our meal, Kramer approached the sushi counter, thanked the chef, and peeked at his knife. It was a cheap Western chef's knife, not even a sushi blade. Outside on the sidewalk, Kramer paused to absorb the incident. "You would *never* see that in Japan," he said. The encounter explains a lot about the great war between Japanese and Western cutlery, a story that unfolds the moment these two kinds of knives hit a simple sharpening steel.

Since any good knife can be made razor sharp, the ultimate question is what happens to it in the minutes, hours, and weeks after its first use, as cooks cut food. Part of the answer lies in the hardness of the steel, which is commonly measured by a family of devices called Rockwell scales. These



punch steel with a pin, then calibrate its resistance from zero to near seventy. (Some of the world’s softest steels, with Rockwell ratings down in the teens, are found in our buildings and bridges, where elasticity is paramount; items such as train tracks and car axles fall somewhere in the middle, with Rockwells in the thirties and forties. At the top of the scale are tool steels, such as drill bits and ball bearings, and knives.) On the retail market, Western knives tend to be the softest, with Rockwell ratings in the middle to upper fifties. This makes a Western knife dull in a relatively forgiving fashion: the microscopic teeth at the knife’s edge bend over. A sharpening steel’s purpose, therefore, is to push back the blade’s teeth so they stand up and cut again. (In this sense, a sharpening steel doesn’t actually sharpen; it just realigns, or “hones,” the edge. On a Western knife, in fact, the hairlike edge is often so soft that, when sharpened, it forms a flimsy, invisible burr, which is best removed with a compound-soaked leather wheel or strop.) The Rockwell of a traditional Japanese knife, by contrast, runs in the middle sixties—at least near its edge, which is often harder than its more resilient back side. The blade’s profile also tends to be thinner, because Japanese cuisine revolves around relatively yielding foods (primarily fish and soft vegetables). If Japanese knives are restricted to this cuisine, and used carefully, they will remain sharp far longer than Western knives do; this is what cutlery dealers really mean when they say that Japanese knives are “sharper.” When the edge of a Japanese knife dulls, however, its tiny teeth do not bend: their points break off. That’s what happens, quickly and disastrously, when a traditional Japanese knife is “steeled.” If damaged like this, Japanese knives can be fixed only with a proper set of sharpening stones or an expert regrinding. This partly explains why they have been slow to catch on in Western kitchens. Americans simply eat more roughly than the Japanese do. We cook ribs and T-bone steaks. We split chickens. When halving an acorn squash or making a post-Thanksgiving sandwich, the average American reaches for any knife that’s handy—thick or thin—and treats a cutting board like a chopping block. As a result, any cutlery dealer can regale you with stories about customers who have come in, frustrated, with chipped Japanese knives. Kramer has been approached by dozens of professional chefs with this complaint, mostly during his six-year stint as a knife sharpener—a business he once operated out of the back of an old bread truck.

Kramer first became fascinated by sharpening in the mid-nineteen-eighties, when he was in his early twenties, and was hopping from restaurant to restaurant as a prep cook. In each kitchen, he met chefs who knew almost nothing about knives. “These are our main tools,” he recalls thinking. “Why don’t we know how to take care of them?” Kramer decided to learn everything he could about the process. At first, all he found were the coarse electric sharpening machines popular at the time, which do little more than ruin a good knife. Then he heard about an

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unusual travel opportunity: for seven hundred dollars, Eastern Airlines was letting people design their own cross-country tours, with stops in six cities. Kramer chose New York, Chicago, Phoenix, Atlanta, San Francisco, and, finally, his home town of Seattle. At each stop, he recalled, "I went to every knife store I could find in the Yellow Pages, and asked to see its sharpening room." Most turned him down. Then he arrived in San Francisco, where, at a small shop named Columbus Cutlery, an elderly Italian man led him into a room outfitted with a variety of sharpening wheels, all slowly turning on one big spindle. The cutler taught Kramer the nuances of the proper grind, how to lubricate a wheel with lard, and how to look for, and correct, irregularities in a blade. Upon returning to Seattle, Kramer spent the next three years setting up his truck to look just like the Italian's workshop.

One evening, Kramer noticed an ad for a two-week course in Washington, Arkansas, where the American Bladesmith Society would teach people how to hand-forge knives. Kramer took the course, returned to Seattle, built a forge in his garage, and almost burned his house down. Four years later, in 1997, he was running three folk-art import stores and a hip little shop in a downtown warehouse which offered sharpening services and handmade knives. Kramer now felt ready to seek a Master Bladesmith's certification, a coronation that the A.B.S. confers once a year, in Atlanta, at the Blade Show and International Cutlery Fair. Kramer passed, on his first attempt, but he still vividly recalls his jitters the night before his exam. He woke up repeatedly, oiling and cleaning his knives again and again—anything that "would put some good juju in 'em." Throughout his hotel, other bladesmiths were going through similar moments of panic.

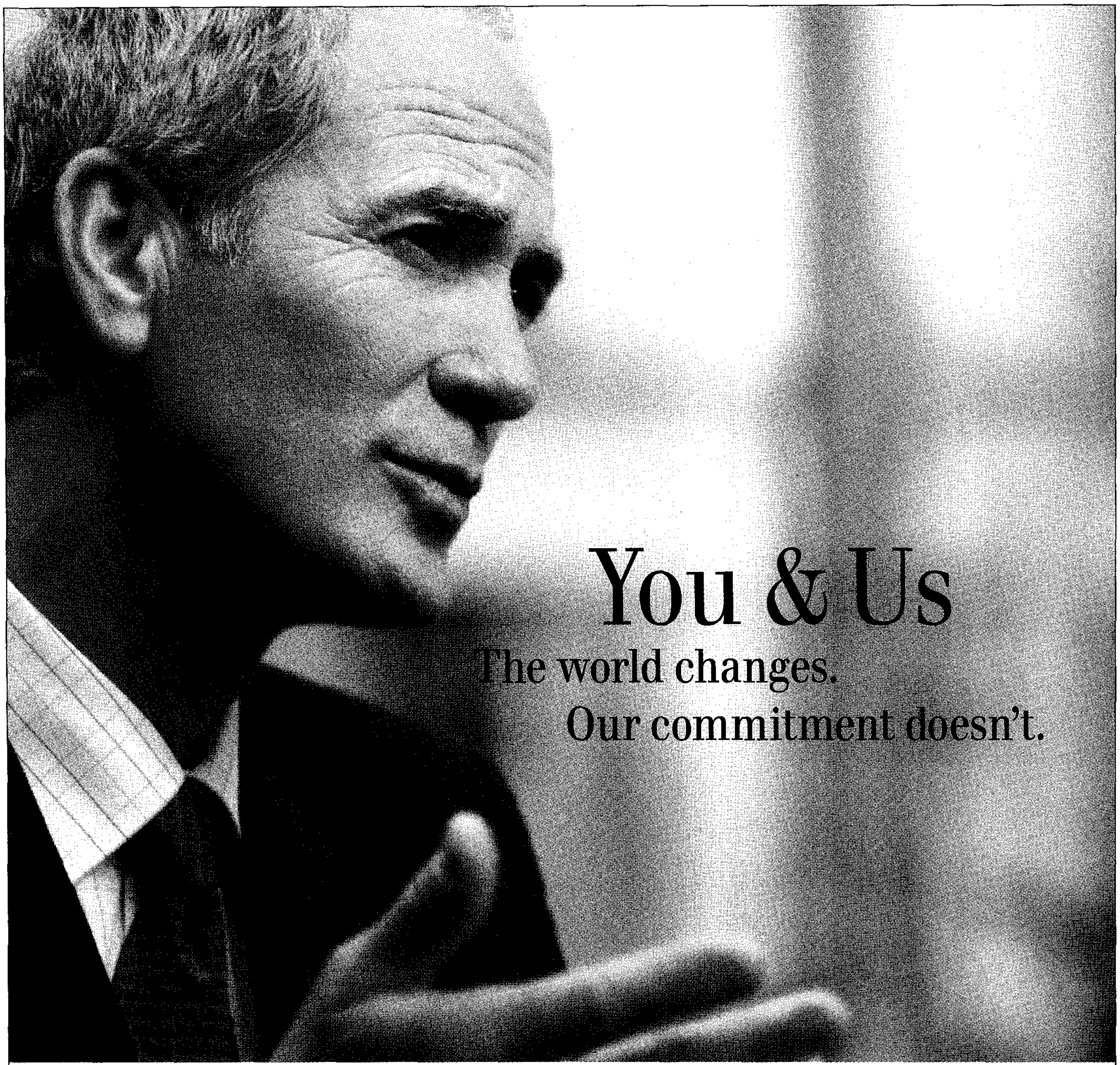
When I visited this year's convention, I got a chance to watch the collective anxiety unfold. On the show's opening morning, twenty knifemakers arrived with hopes of being certified as either a Journeyman or a Master Smith. Most were already commercially successful—some sell their knives for thousands of dollars apiece. Still, the mineral oil and Q-tips were flying up to the last moment. This was the aspiring bladesmiths' final exam, their "American Idol" moment—an achievement so significant in the bladesmiths' world that it has caught the interest of the old craftsmen's guilds of Europe. The knifemakers had each brought five gallery-quality knives, which they laid out on white tablecloths with their test knife—the fifteen-inch bowie that each man (all were men) had used, under the watchful eye of a senior smith, to cut rope, lumber, and arm hair, and that was now bent ninety degrees. The judges, a collection of veteran Master Smiths, explained that the slightest imperfection in a blade would cause the maker to fail. The same went for tardiness. In response, one smith, whose hotel was only ten minutes away, got up at 3 A.M. to make sure that he wouldn't be late. Another, an American based in Australia named Shawn McIntyre, said that he woke up "fifteen to twenty times" with a persistent dream that the wood on his dagger handle had shrunk by a quarter of an inch. ("I kept telling myself, 'This can't be happening! Go back to sleep!' ") None of them reported having slept more than a few hours. ("Sleep?" a pipe fitter from Columbus, Ohio, asked. He laughed. "My whole life is on the line, that's all.") As a hazing ritual, the judges often tell smiths who are about to pass that they have "bad news"—a greeting that caused one applicant's blood pressure to rise so high that he had to go to the hospital.

All this may sound extreme, but so are the judges' standards, which are neatly illustrated by the story of Bill Burke. In 2002, a trucker used Burke's knife to escape from a wreck. The trucker had first tried another knife, made of the same steel, but it snapped; Burke's knife cut a large hole in the truck's cab, reportedly made of "double-thick-layered steel," and suffered only a mild chip. When the news spread, knife orders poured in. Several years later, Burke applied for his master's smithing stamp, but the judges turned him down—for mistakes that apparently didn't bother the show's buyers. "Even though the judges failed me," Burke told me, "all of the knives I brought were gone in about fifteen minutes." One sold for forty-eight hundred dollars. This year, the judges finally passed him.

Kramer's role at this year's show was to serve as a human display item at the booth for the U.S. division of Kai, the Japanese houseware and cutlery corporation that is manufacturing Kramer's Sur La Table line, under its explosively successful brand, Shun. Kramer's booth demands turned out to be light, however, so he spent most of his time racing around the exhibit hall.

His frenzy was easy to understand. The place held eight hundred booths and tables offering items such as sheep horn and mammoth tusk for knife handles;

"I'm nothing, and yet I'm all I can think about."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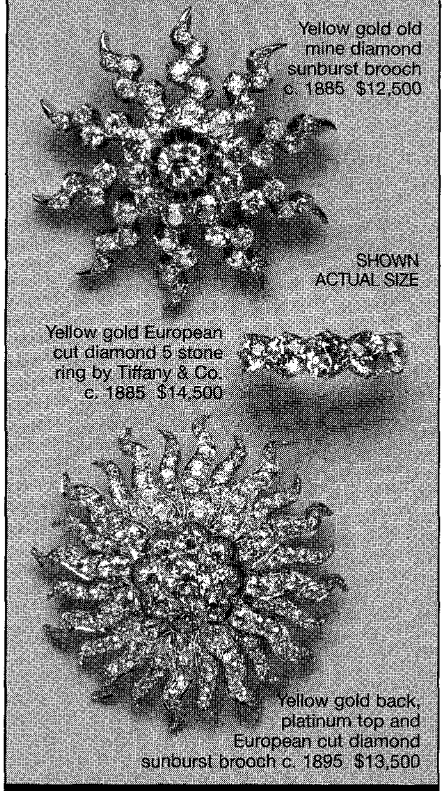

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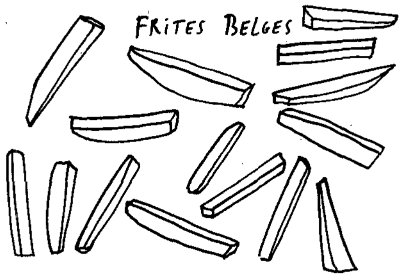
myriad rods and sheets of metal; all manner of sharpening gear, wood, and precious stones; and, of course, thousands of knives. Curiously, while this is the world's largest blade show, only a handful of the makers there produce kitchen knives. Most make sport and high-tech "tactical" knives (partly in pursuit of contracts from the military, which still regards a knife as the soldier's ideal all-purpose tool, and the weapon of last resort). The result is an annual spread of staggering lethality: pocket knives of every design (and price) imaginable, sheath knives smaller than your little finger, and medieval cleavers longer than your arm. At table after table, big men with thick fingers showed off knives with such intricate patterns that one would think they were made by a diminutive Old World jeweller.

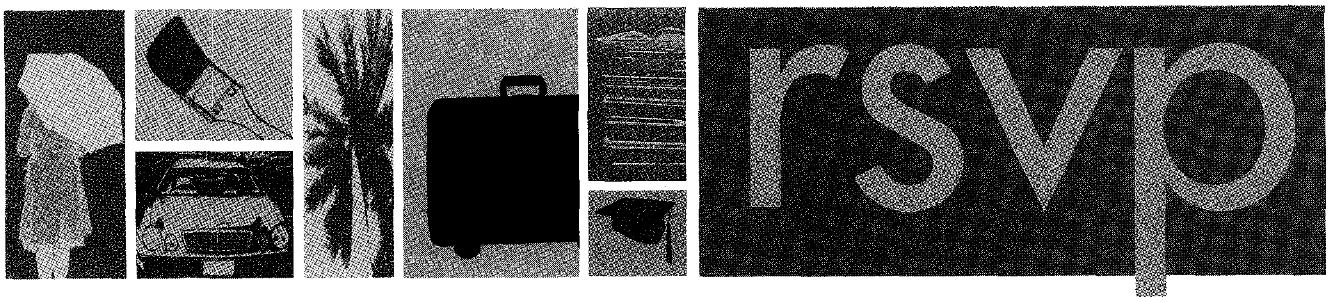
Much of this energy is relatively new. "When I first got into this business, in 1964, I had a hard time finding fifteen knifemakers from Alaska to Florida," A. G. Russell, the ascot-wearing don of the modern knife market, told me. "I've got three thousand in my computer file now." The surge of interest seems partly due to the Internet, which not only has made once obscure items suddenly accessible but has also spread knowledge about the craft behind these items to a younger generation. "The guys just starting out today, their knives are as good as the best makers' fifteen to twenty years ago," Steve Shackleford, the editor of the magazine *Blade*, told me.

To see how these knives can perform, I watched a cutting contest one afternoon, staged in the parking lot outside the exhibit hall. The contestants, armed with huge knives made especially for these competitions, were being timed as they cut through a stack of shingles, then another of unopened soda cans; several rolling golf and tennis balls; two two-by-fours; three pieces of tough Manila rope of assorted thicknesses up to two inches; a roll of bamboo six inches thick (this is an old samurai training trick, meant to simulate cutting through a body); a large plastic bottle of water (straight down, starting with its cap); and a thick cardboard tube, as many times as they could, as though preparing gourmet cucumber rounds. Most of them accomplished all these feats in less than a minute. One was a man in his sixties who the judge said "cuts like he used to when he had hair." When the contest finished, I inspected the competitors' knives. Their razor-sharp edges were virtually intact.

To my surprise, most of these knives were not forged by bladesmiths but ground out (although still by hand) from factory steel produced by Crucible Specialty Metals, of Syracuse, New York, one of the United States' last remaining tool-steel mills. The grade used in these knives was a high-tech alloy, which holds an edge that is ferocious but difficult to sharpen. "It would probably eat up a water stone," Kramer told me. In some ways, these obstinate alloys keep solo smiths in business. A significant virtue of a forged Kramer knife is that it takes a keen edge, holds it well, yet sharpens easily; one of Kramer's fans, Charlie Palmer, the award-winning chef of the Aureole restaurants, told me that he can revive the edge on his Kramer knife with "literally four or five motions" on a basic water stone (which is about the size of a cribbage board). Kramer's knives achieve this level of performance because their Rockwell ratings hover around sixty—comfortably between Europe's soft cutlery and the hard blades of Japan—and because his carbon steel has an unusually fine grain structure. Carbon steel does have the drawback that it rusts, which is what led, a century ago, to the invention of "stainless" steel. This is actually something of a misnomer, since food acids and other liquids will eventually corrode any steel; for this reason, honest cutlers prefer the term "stain-resistant." To be even "stain-resistant," though, steel must contain chromium, which creates an edge that is normally coarser, and more difficult to sharpen, than its carbon cousin.

To be fair, many A.B.S. smiths make carbon-steel knives that perform as well as Kramer's on a stone; a few even make kitchen knives. But cooks who have used a broad range of cutlery told me that Kramer's knives have a balance, a physical comfort, a lightness and ease on the cutting board that their competitors





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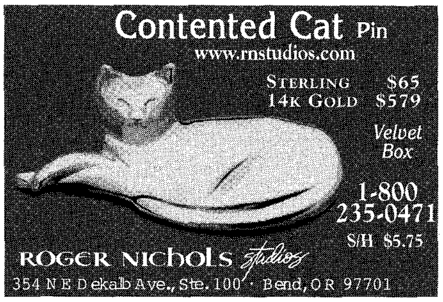
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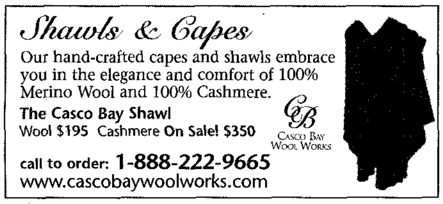
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lack. Thomas Keller, of California's French Laundry restaurant and New York's Per Se, calls his Kramer meat slicer his "show knife." Lisa McManus, a senior editor at *Cook's Illustrated*, said that her testing team was surprised by how quickly and smoothly Kramer's chef's knife cut up a raw chicken. When her teammates attempted the same task with other knives, they were soon "sweating and cursing," their blades slipping in their hands.

In the exhibit hall, Kramer set out one morning in search of additional insights, specifically regarding Frank Richtig. This led him to Al Pendray, who was standing behind a table where some of the show's most serious knife collectors were gathered. Al Pendray is a farrier (a horseshoer) in Williston, Florida; in the course of a fifty-year career, he has shod, by his estimation, as many as two hundred and fifty thousand horses. Among those are five winners of the Kentucky Derby and several dozen others that have placed in a Triple Crown race. He is also a Master Bladesmith, and is famous for almost single-handedly re-creating the ancient Persian method for making a highly distinctive form of steel called Damascus. The Damascus pattern originated sometime in the third or fourth century, A.D., but it has become commercially popular only recently, largely because of its evocative appearance: a watery swirl on the blade's surface. Today, the effect is typically achieved by welding slabs of different metals together and then etching the surface to reveal their contrasts. The original Damascus, now known as "wootz," achieved its watery striations very differently: by growing those whorls, organically, within a single piece of metal. Wootz has long fascinated metalsmiths—first, because it was reputed to make unusually lethal weapons (legend has it that, during the Crusades, Muslim soldiers sliced up not only their European opponents but their swords as well), and, second, because, in the early eighteen-hundreds, the technique for making wootz was pretty much lost. Ever since, European scientists have been experimenting and theorizing. Then, one day in June of 1993, a Florida horseshoer appeared at a Damascus conference in Hagen, Germany.

Pendray's blades, which have an eerie charcoal color, proved to be the first ever to match the old Persian patterns. Could they cut the same too? To find out, Pendray and one of his smithing partners, John Verhoeven, a professor emeritus of engineering at Iowa State University, subjected Pendray's knives to an ancient Eastern test: cut a silk scarf as it floats to the ground. A scarf is so light that most knives, even when razor sharp, either grab the silk or leave a ragged cut. When the scarf was slashed by Pendray's blade, Verhoeven told me, "it looked like it had been cut with a pair of scissors." Verhoeven suspected something unusual involving carbides, which are compounds that result when carbon and other elements, such as iron or chromium, bond during forging. (Bladesmiths love carbides, because they are hard and sharp, like microscopic diamonds.) Pendray's signal discovery was a way to control how the carbides aligned, which yielded wootz's unique pattern. If luck strikes, Verhoeven explained, those carbides can line up along a knife's edge.

Pendray's initial forays were hit or miss; it took him and Verhoeven ten years to figure out a recipe that produces wootz consistently. (The ingredients have included fresh-picked tree leaves, broken glass, oyster shells, and a pinch of vanadium.) Pendray can now talk about the innards of steel with anyone, blacksmith or physics professor. That's why Kramer stopped by his show table—to see what new metallurgical findings Pendray could suggest that might help a knife cut a bolt.

Pendray promptly took Kramer on an hour's conversational ride, through the ins and outs of how carbon and iron, the basic flour and water of steel, behave under various conditions. Carbon, Pendray says, "is one of the fastest-moving little atoms. They're very active. They boogie all around." And they continually surprise, Pendray said, sometimes "spheroidizing the whole cotton-pickin' thing!" (That's when carbides in steel assume a spherical shape, lessening the metal's brittleness.)

Once Kramer had soaked up enough new possibilities, he walked me to a table that offered some of the garden-variety Damascus that's made today. Here, he explained the differences between the average American smith's treatment of this form (which he follows) and the version generally found on industrial cutlery. In smith-made Damascus, carbon steel and other metals are forged into hundreds of layers, and often mixed throughout the knife the way vanilla and caramel are twisted into saltwater taffy. Commercial

Damascus generally uses only a few dozen layers, and the pattern is laminated onto regular knife steel, creating something like a ham sandwich: the bread and condiments are the whorled Damascus; the ham in the middle is the blade's core steel—the knife's cutting edge. This technique of cladding had been devised by various Eastern cultures before high-grade steel was mass-produced, and it once had a practical purpose. It allowed smiths to surround a strip of good, hard steel with cheap, softer metal. Modern Damascus, however, is usually made entirely of high-grade metals. The combination is attractive and, if the knife were ever used like an axe, the slightly softer jacket might keep a blade from snapping in half. In a standard kitchen, though, today's Damascus does virtually nothing, despite cutlery dealers' claims that rough surfaces keep food from sticking to the blade. Still, plenty of respected cutlery is made with these laminations, including some of the finest knives in Japan. Kramer's Shun knives were being fabricated this way, too, with some of today's new, high-grade, stainless steel, in a design that he hoped would remain faithful to his principles.

On Kramer's first morning in Japan, he was treated to an unexpectedly tense meeting at Kai's Shun factory, which is based in Seki City, a small industrial town in Japan's geographic belly that was once a center for samurai sword-making, and is now known for its mass-produced cutlery. The factory is housed in a boxy, modern building that is surrounded by the tiny commercial vegetable gardens, many no bigger than half an acre, that speckle nearly every Japanese city outside central Tokyo. On the factory's top floor, as Kramer and the leading players from Kai and Sur La Table collected outside a conference room, eight women in matching checkered vests stood up in their cubicles and bowed in unison to greet everyone. Almost immediately, though, the meeting led to conflict over last-minute changes, one of which involved a seemingly simple matter: whether Kai could smooth out the blunt sides of Kramer's knives. These edges—the "heel," at the back of the blade, near the handle, and, more important, the "spine," along the top—are typically squared off, because that is how industrial machines stamp out a blade. But the harsh corners can irritate the hand. As petty as this point may seem, it matters greatly to professional cooks. The Japanese, for instance, control their knives by pressing their forefinger on the spine. Western cooks often go further, and "choke up" on a blade when they chop food; I've talked to some who showed me deep, cracked calluses at the base of their forefingers. Knowing this, Kramer, like many smiths, puts a "crowned" spine and a rounded heel on each of his custom knives, and for months he had been pushing Kai to do the same. "We talked about it," Dennis Epstein, Kai U.S.A.'s senior manager, said. "We just didn't have the skill to do it."

Kramer was baffled by this. Kai's industrial process, after all, was distinguished by its emphasis on hand-finishing—a pro-

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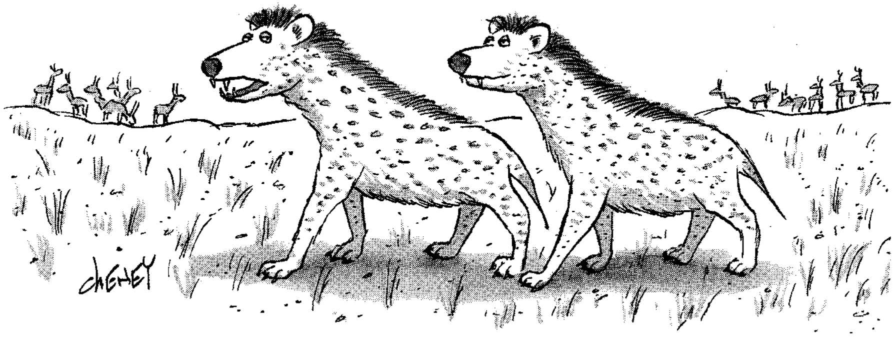

"You mean all this time you've been laughing at me—not with me?"

cess we had just witnessed during a tour, where we saw most of the factory's workforce bent over grinding wheels. But Epstein argued that the time it would take to crown a knife would price Kramer's knives out of the market. Kramer disagreed, and performed a mock demonstration of how he crowns a knife on a grinder within minutes. Epstein grimaced. "*None* of the mass-produced knives in the marketplace have a crowned spine," he said. Yet hadn't Epstein just been talking to the Sur La Table executives about the retail market's continual need for new knife designs? "You're spending so much time trying to be innovative," Kramer said. "This is a very simple innovation that will pay off for the life of the knife, and that every serious cook will appreciate, every time they use it. And the thing is, no one's doing it." (Months later, when Kramer's Shun knives hit the stores, there was noticeable improvement. But the spines and heels, and the handles, did not compare to those on a custom Kramer.)

In the following days, Kai entertained its guests royally while continuing to stumble with more design and production details. This concerned the Sur La Table people, and their difficulties say a lot about the recent upheavals in the cutlery market. For most of the past century, European knifemakers (primarily Wüsthof and Henckels, the two German giants) have dominated the market for mass-produced cutlery. In essence, while the Japanese were perfecting assembly-line craftsmanship, the Germans perfected their robots. Over the past decade, however, American cooks began to grow interested in Japanese knives, a trend that Kai jumped on, in 2003, with its Shun line. Suddenly, culinary aficionados began talking about those "clunky" German knives. Demand for Shun cutlery soon outstripped Kai's capacities, leaving its executives scrambling to please everyone.

Japan, of course, has no shortage of expert knifemakers, and Kramer managed to visit several in Niigata, a province north of Tokyo that specializes in a variety of handmade tools, including kitchen cutlery. While most small Japanese bladesmithing shops make knives only in the Japanese style—that is, with a one-sided, "single bevel" edge—Niigata smiths also forge knives with the symmetrical, double bevel that is popular in the West. One is Junichi Takagi, a tiny seventy-one-year-old with soot-black hands who is reputedly Japan's last artisan of carpenter's adzes. He also makes a simple, crude-looking kitchen knife that Kramer was particularly taken with. "I bet it will get sharper the more you use it," Kramer told me. During tests, the behavior of Takagi's steel—its sparks on a grinding wheel, its "toothy" capacity to cut rope again and again—suggested ingredients that Kramer thought would, when combined with his own steels, create a distinctive Damascus edge. "You're getting, basically, three different surfaces," he said. "It's freakishly good cutting material." Takagi, after all, was accustomed to making tools that had to survive hours of slamming through lumber. Sure enough, his steel, which is especially wear-resistant because it contains tungsten, was a kind that Kramer cannot find in the United States. He promptly ordered some.

Before we left, Takagi, who works in a narrow, smoky shop, mentioned, in a moment of classic Japanese humility, that, despite fifty years of experience making tools, he was still learning, still striving "to reach my goal." When I asked what that goal was, he was taken aback. After an awkward pause, he said that his dream was to be classified as a Living National Treasure by the government—an honor currently reserved, in the realm of tools and cutlery, for a select group of samurai-sword makers.

One morning, when Kramer was back in Seattle, he called with some exciting news: a package had just arrived from the nation's leading Richtig knife collector, Harlan Suedmeier. "There are about twelve knives in there," Kramer said. "My heart is pounding. They're cool. They are very simple, and they are *thin*. If these things go through a bolt, I've got a *lot* to learn."

Although Richtig collectors tend not to test their knives, Suedmeier was willing to let Kramer test two "to destruction." Kramer soon struck his best Richtig pose and started hammering. The blade crumpled. Kramer was crestfallen; then he found one of Richtig's old advertisements, in which the smith acknowledged using wider edges for demonstrations. Kramer retraced his Atlanta conversation with Pendray, returned to his metallurgy books, and discovered a diagram that might lead to a crucial refinement. Then he forged some steel that, when broken open, revealed an unusually "creamy" grain structure. He promptly sent some samples to a laboratory, to see if the grain size was dropping to a level that would allow some extra hardness without lessening the blade's resilience.

To his surprise, the laboratory report came back with only a partial reading: apparently, Kramer's grain structure was so fine that the laboratory's microscope couldn't bring the particles into focus. Elated, Kramer returned to his forge. Days later, he sent me a photograph of a bolt and a baby pork bone, both splayed open with numerous slices. Lying on top of them was a blade with a fat but unchipped edge. Kramer had cut a newspaper with it, too. He knew it was not a knife for tomatoes, but it was enough to make him dream about more experiments when his Japanese steel arrived, and another possible breakthrough: a kitchen knife that would cut through a cooked lamb bone. "That," he said, "would be huge." ♦

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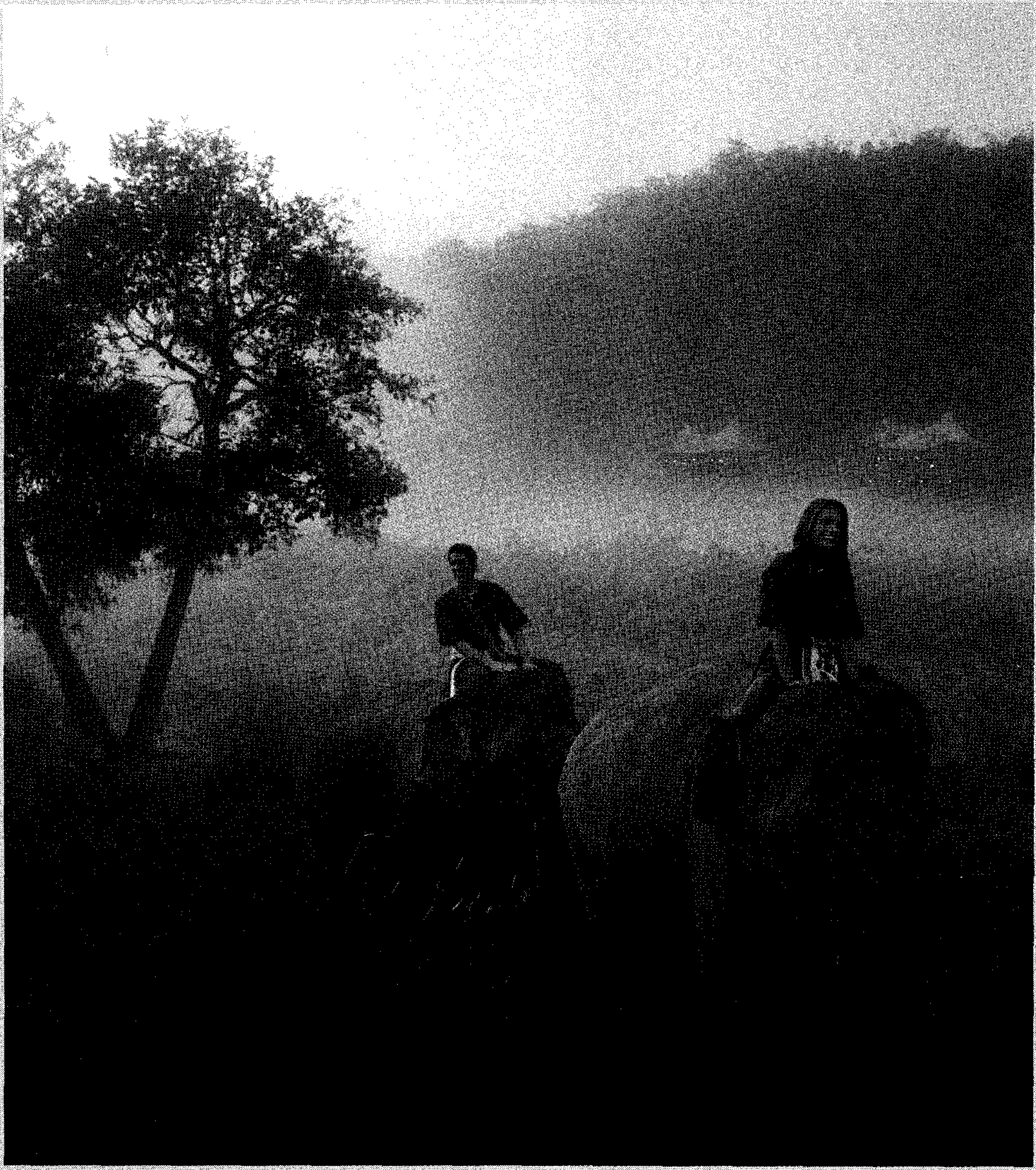

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PERSONAL HISTORY

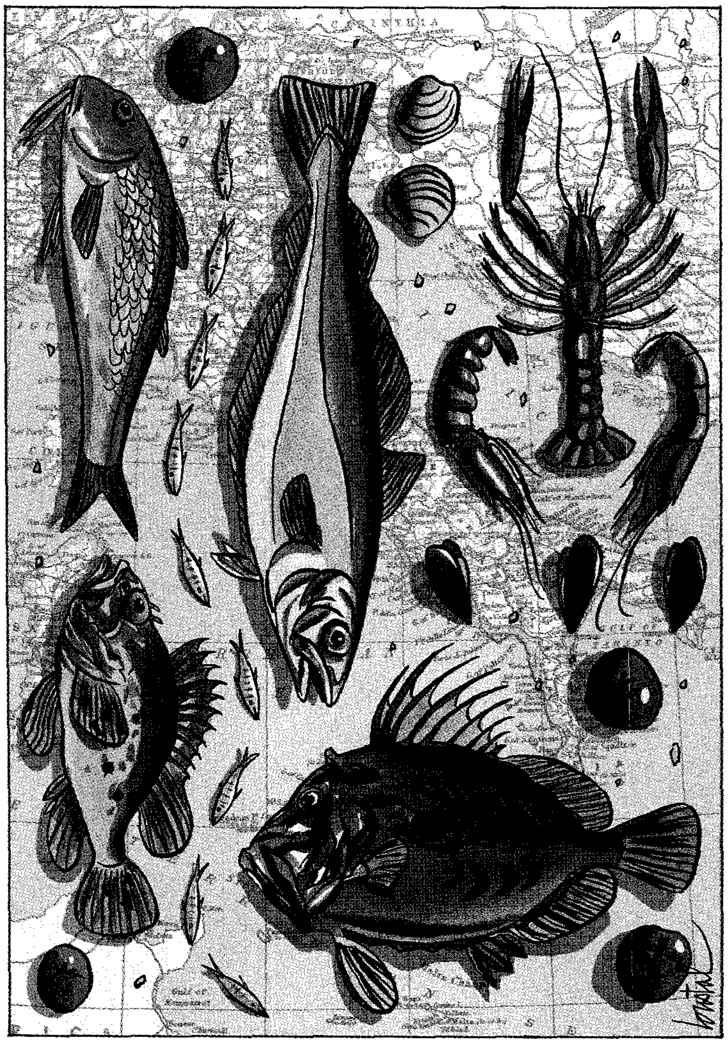
ONE FISH, TWO FISH

In pursuit of an Adriatic specialty.

BY MIMI SHERATON

For more than half a century, I've had an obsession with a fish soup. It has led me on searches up and down the Adriatic Coast of Italy, but it all started with a brief mention over a family meal in a Bronx apartment. The man I was dating invited me to his parents' for dinner. Having heard that his Italian-born mother, Giovannina Falcone, was proud of her cooking, I wanted to seem properly appreciative and knowing. So when she served huge, steaming bowls of snow-white fish and red-shelled seafood in a broth fragrant with garlic, wine, and chilies, I summoned up my best Italian pronunciation and said, "Ah—zuppa di pesce!"

"Not zuppa di pesce!" she said firmly, drawing herself to her full substantial height, her black wavy hair and dark eyes fairly bristling with indignation. "Where I come from it is brodetto!" Where she came from was the Abruzzi, the Italian region celebrated for cooks who are as skillful at roasting the meats of the formidable Apennine Mountains as they are at frying and simmering the fish from the Adriatic Sea. Of the seafood dishes, none is more highly prized than *brodetto vastese*, the fish soup of her home town, Vasto.



Each region has its own views about how a real brodetto is made.

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

Brodetto—the word is the diminutive of *brodo*, or broth—is basically a bouillabaisse-like assortment of seafood. Waverley Root, one of the great food writers of the modern era, credits Greece as the origin of such fish soup-stews, although, given the likelihood that fishermen gathering random unsold fish would quickly cook them all together in a seasoned broth, it's hard to believe that any one culture can be credited with the invention. Like bouillabaisse, brodetto sparks heated culinary controversies as to authenticity.

The regional authenticity of the various brodetti depends on what kinds of seafood are required or forbidden. Can there be crustaceans? Should there be mollusks? The answers vary from region to region, and often from cook to cook. But some rules remain consistent. The all-Adriatic seafood must first be washed in Adriatic seawater (which raises the question of how far inland a true brodetto can be made). The cooking vessel should be terra cotta, and, preferably, it should be a *tiella*, a pie-pan-shaped cooking dish. And, to absolute purists, brodetto must include *scorfano*, the scorpion fish, whose poisonous spine must be carefully removed before the fish can safely add its silky texture and defining earthy flavor.

After the man I had dated, Richard Falcone, became my husband, we began making regular trips to the Adriatic Coast, visiting his mother's family in the Abruzzi, and then travelling south to his father's relatives in Apulia. Although we had many dinners in their homes, they never served fish, following the local custom of preparing meat for guests. So my enduring obsession with fish soup meant intermittent forays all along the Adriatic Coast, starting up north in Trieste, a moody gray city with Hapsburg and Slovenian overtones. There, at a fish restaurant on a small marina, the brodetto I ordered arrived as a single whole sea bass simmered in a broth of tomato, olive oil, wine vinegar, and onions, all nested on creamy polenta—nothing like the aquarium I was expecting. A few days later, driving west toward Venice, my husband and I stopped for lunch in Grado, a canal-lined watercolor of a town. Again, it proved to be a delicious impostor, this time with two whole plump red mullets in the heady broth.

After a morning tour of Venice's sparkling fish market near the Rialto Bridge, I was hoping to find a brodetto that included a good sampling of what was on display in the market. I did, but I also learned that the Venetians seemed little concerned about the ingredients that popular orthodoxy had deemed critical to the soup's authenticity. A freewheeling attitude is even advocated in "The da Fiore Cookbook," written by Damiano Martin, the manager of the elegant Venetian restaurant Osteria da Fiore: "Exact portioning and mandatory ingredients violate the soulful spirit of brodetto."

But drive two and a half hours south, to the Emilia-Romagna town of Ravenna, and the strictures start multiplying. In particular, the people there consider eel to be an important enriching ingredient. I heeded Elizabeth David's advice, in "Italian Food," that for the best *brodetto alla ravennate* one must go to the nearby marina, close to the beach where, as she notes, Lord Byron rode on horseback. Except, I would caution, do not go after early September, because at the end of the season everything slows down, including a faded garden restaurant where the brodetto seemed as passé as summer: tired, needled with bones, and bland. David's recipe called for garlic, vinegar, and oregano; this brodetto seemed innocent of them all.

Nothing I encountered along the northern Adriatic Coast prepared me for the intricacies, exuberances, and competitions that brodetto engenders in the Marche, the region between Emilia-Romagna and the Abruzzi. Nor was I prepared for the fervor exhibited by my friend Federico Baldeschi-Balleani, a scion of an aristocratic family of the Marche, when I asked him for advice in tracking the fish soups. Federico, who is thirty-six, divides his time between New York, where he grew up, and Villa Fontedamo, the family estate, where he was beginning to arrange small tours of the Marche for visitors with very special interests. "Let's experiment with a brodetto tour," he suggested. "We'll begin by speaking to Gianni."

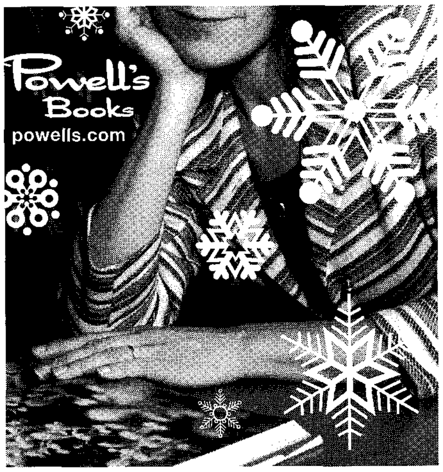
Gianni Giacani, the chef-patrone of Hostaria Santa Lucia, a small, impeccable restaurant in the medieval-walled town of Jesi, is a veritable culinary ichthyologist, studying edible varieties so that he can handle and prepare each in a way that makes the most of its unique qualities. "To really understand brodetto, you must see where it begins," he advised. "If you can be ready at three o'clock tomorrow morning, we'll go to the fish market in Ancona."

The one thing I'd gladly get up for at that hour is a large wholesale fish market, to me the most exciting of all food venues. I love the salty, deep-sea aroma, the slick wetness, and the frenetic shouts and the tension as venders try to sell their highly perishable stock and buyers bargain for good prices. Then, there's the staggering assortment of fish and their colors—creamy white, silvery, rosy, charcoal, chrome yellow, and hot orange—and, in many such markets, a section of live eels and lobsters writhing in tanks, and clams of all sizes, which seem to be sizzling in their aerated tub baths.

And so, on a damp and chilly moonless night, my husband, Federico, and I joined Gianni in his small pickup truck. As Gianni drove, I mentioned to him that a chef in Denmark once told me that bouillabaisse was a gastronomic crime because it mixed different fish and so compromised individual flavors. He made a face. "Cooking various fish together does not confuse the flavors but instead it raises their tenor," he said, adding that he prepares brodetto only on request, because people today prefer food that is easier and less messy to handle. It's a preference that explains why fillets have been edging out whole fish at most fishmongers and restaurants in our own country, to the distress of serious seafood lovers.

En route, Gianni explained that, in the Marche, thirteen is the classic number of seafood types for a true brodetto (the number is meant to honor the thirteen guests at the Last Supper), but that many chefs use more or fewer. Essential ingredients include some form of squid (*calamari*) or cuttlefish (*seppie*), often used for the stock—with or without fish heads—and the soft, slightly acidic gray mantis shrimp (*canocchia* or *panocchia*) that is abundant in Adriatic waters, along with monkfish (*coda di rospo*), skate (*razza*), dogfish (*gattuccio*), sea bass (*spigola*), octopus (*polpo*), John Dory (*San Pietro*), small lobsters (*aragosto*), red mullet (*triglia*), whiting (*merlano*) or hake (*merluzzo*), crab (*granchio*), langoustine, and, of course, *scorfano*. Now becoming rare, the scorpion fish is often omitted, but, according to Gianni, "No *scorfano*, no brodetto." Opinions vary as to the inclusion of clams (*vongole*) and mussels (*cozze* or, locally, *muscoli*). "You will see here only fish from the Adriatic, and, because that sea is not very deep, there are no very large fish," he said, and it's true that the largest fish I saw in the market was a three-pound turbot.

Entering the darkened city of Ancona, the Marche's unprepossessing capital and its largest industrial port, we felt as though we were the only people awake. But far off toward the sea there was an arc of light that seemed to throb as we drew



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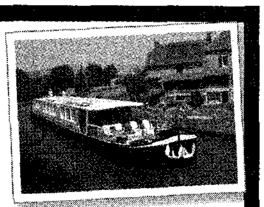
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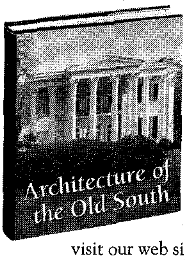

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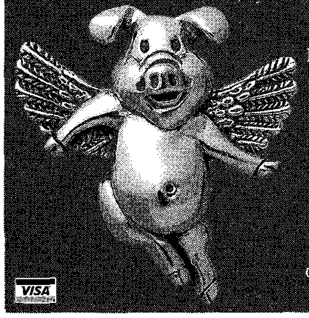
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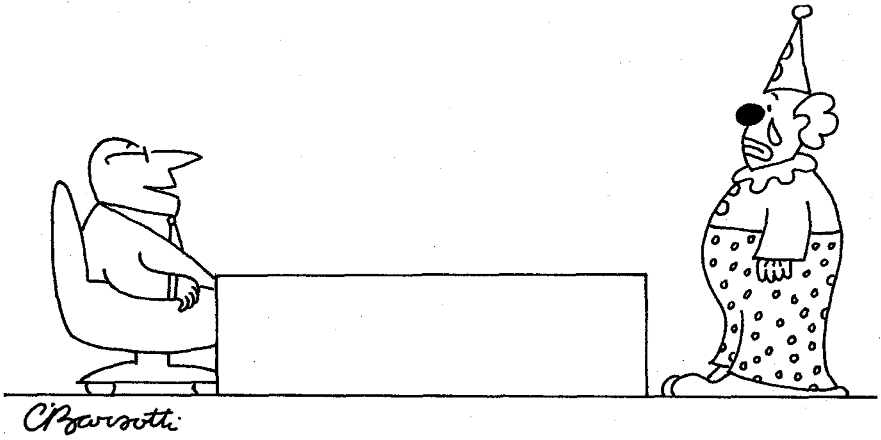


"We're laying you off, but, as a favor, how about one last pratfall on your way out?"

• •

closer, until we were in the midst of the brilliant wet and clamorous life of the wharves. Fishing boats were anchored at piers, and buyers searched out their favorite sources to assess the day's catch. Porters rushed dollies loaded with crates from pier to market hall, where crates and bins were stacked up to display the day's catch, each batch numbered so that buyers could note those they would bid on during the auction.

The auction room was a soaring amphitheatre rimmed on three sides by four horseshoe-shaped tiers of seating. They overlooked three moving conveyor belts, which carried the batches of fish in bins, so they could be viewed from above before being bid on. Over those conveyor belts was a huge electronic scoreboard that flashed the number of each batch, along with the name of the ship it came in on, the type and weight of the fish, and a starting high bid: the fish are sold in a "reverse auction," in which prospective buyers using handheld remotes bid down from that asking price, their offers flashing on the main scoreboard. Anxious not to risk losing the turbots and John Dories he most wanted, Gianni several times bought before the price had gone down at all. Toward the end of this three-hour auction, the larger-scale buyers left, and owners of small retail shops and restaurants stayed to bid on mixed batches of fish and crustaceans that met their more limited needs.

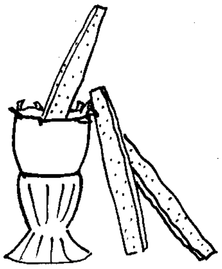
With such a vast and operatic fish market, small wonder that the Marche takes brodetto so seriously. The four main recognized versions of the soup are from the towns of Ancona, San Benedetto del Tronto, Porto Recanati, and Fano. Finding a precise and consistent definition of each, however, is no easy matter. The most clearly delineated are the brodetti of Porto Recanati and Fano. The first must include threads of the saffron-like safflower plant, or *zafferanella,* that grows on the hillsides behind the town. For Fano, the distinctive ingredient is preserved tomatoes. These are cooked, lightly salted tomatoes that are passed through a sieve to remove seeds and skins, resulting in a chiffon purée that is put up in jars. Nine fish are used for the Fano brodetto at the pretty, flowery restaurant da Tano, among them the mandatory *scorfano* and the mantis shrimp, and other small fish as available in the market. Cuttlefish and clams must be included; calamari and mussels must not.

The most unusual of the brodetti that I sampled in the Marche was the safflower-gilded fish soup of Porto Recanati at the lively restaurant Dario, where, I was told, if *scorfano* isn't available, the fish soup is called *guazzetto.* Luckily, during our visit true brodetto was being served. It was a clamorous Sunday lunch, with exuberant children and merrily exasperated parents gathered for the family's weekend *pranzo.* We delved into deep bowls of the brodetto and didn't come up for air until every bone and shell had been picked clean and every drop of the pepperoncino-spiked broth had been sopped up with yeasty country bread.

Vinegar (though present in some

amount in most Marchigiano brodetti) is said to be the defining ingredient in the fish soup of San Benedetto del Tronto, a version that is declared antique because it adheres to the authentic recipe of *u labirintu* (local dialect for the labyrinth, the small, dense neighborhood where fishermen once lived and shopped). Now a lively modern town with chain boutiques and bargain bookstores, San Benedetto has a beachside esplanade lined with rows of graceful palm trees, inexplicably celebrated because they grow in sand. At a large, formal restaurant named Messer Chichibio (after the cook in Boccaccio's Decameron), San Benedetto's brodetto was presented in a huge serving bowl almost overflowing with a broth so heady with vinegar that at first we could hardly swallow it. Gradually, however, the acidity lent a nice astringency to the mildly salty fish. I wasn't convinced that this was really the way they did it back in the good old labyrinth, but took solace from Waverley Root's observation: "The very places most convinced of the sacrosanct quality of their own special variety of *brodetto* sin regularly against it. Their ideal *brodetto* never gets made."

As Dick and I drove south from the Marche to the Abruzzi, I wondered whether I would ever find my ideal brodetto. Almost all the brodetti in the Abruzzi were described on menus as being *vastese*—in the style of Vasto. The main part of that town, with its convivial central piazza, stands high up on a cliff, overlooking a beach lined with resort hotels and, beyond, a wide-open view of the glassy blue Adriatic. The place that everyone there recommended for brodetto was the trattoria of Zi'Albina. *Zia*, meaning aunt, is in Italian food lore what the *mère*, or mother, restaurants are in France—simple places where the cooking is done by a formidable woman, supposedly an aunt or mother, who is a keeper of the flame and never deviates from the traditional home-style, or *casalinga*, dishes, preparing each in the one and only right way. In this case, there was reason to doubt that the elderly Albina still did the cooking, especially when we saw her huddled in a chair at the street-level entrance.



The dining room was humming with satisfied patrons obviously enjoying a leisurely Saturday lunch, spooning portions of brodetto from big communal bowls onto individual plates. The soup was delicious, if somewhat overcooked, with its array of fresh fish, crustaceans, and mussels (no clams), and it was the first in which I tasted two flavorings that typify the *brodetto vastese*—the fiery sting of dried hot red chilies contrasted with the bronze sweetness of dried sweet green peppers, the last being a most unusual, very local ingredient.

Still, my ideal? A few days later, just as I began to suspect that Waverley Root was right, Dick and I visited a nearby restaurant that a local olive-oil producer had recommended for its brodetto, Il Cavalluccio, in the town of Rocca San Giovanni. It turned out to be a big, friendly, rustic resort restaurant with a bathing beach for families, and nets kept in the water to hold live fish until a few minutes before they were needed in the kitchen. Probably the only local fish not on the menu was the seahorse for which the restaurant was named.

The two portions of brodetto arrived, each in a separate terra-cotta *tiella*, in which it had been cooked over raging heat. Neatly lined up in each was an assortment of whole small fish—a red mullet, a whiting, a John Dory—along with fragrant crumbles of *scorfano*, two pearl-gray *canocchie*, one scarlet langoustine, clams and mussels in stony shells, and more, all in a tomato-tinted broth that was so seethingly hot it looked as though the cooked fish were wriggling to escape. After we tasted the broth, with its contrasting hot red and sweet green dried peppers, and the whisper of garlic and the crunch of grilled country bread, it was clear: I had found my ideal brodetto.

We've often promised ourselves to return to Il Cavalluccio and try the brodetto again. Would it be as good as we remembered or had this been a Brigadoon moment? So far, we have not pressed our luck, once again heeding Waverley Root: "The only element about *brodetto* which is always the same is that it is never the same." Alas, if true. ♦

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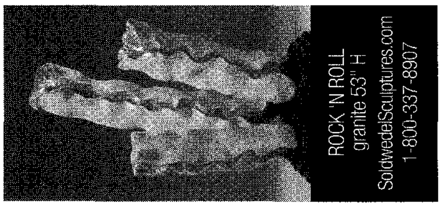

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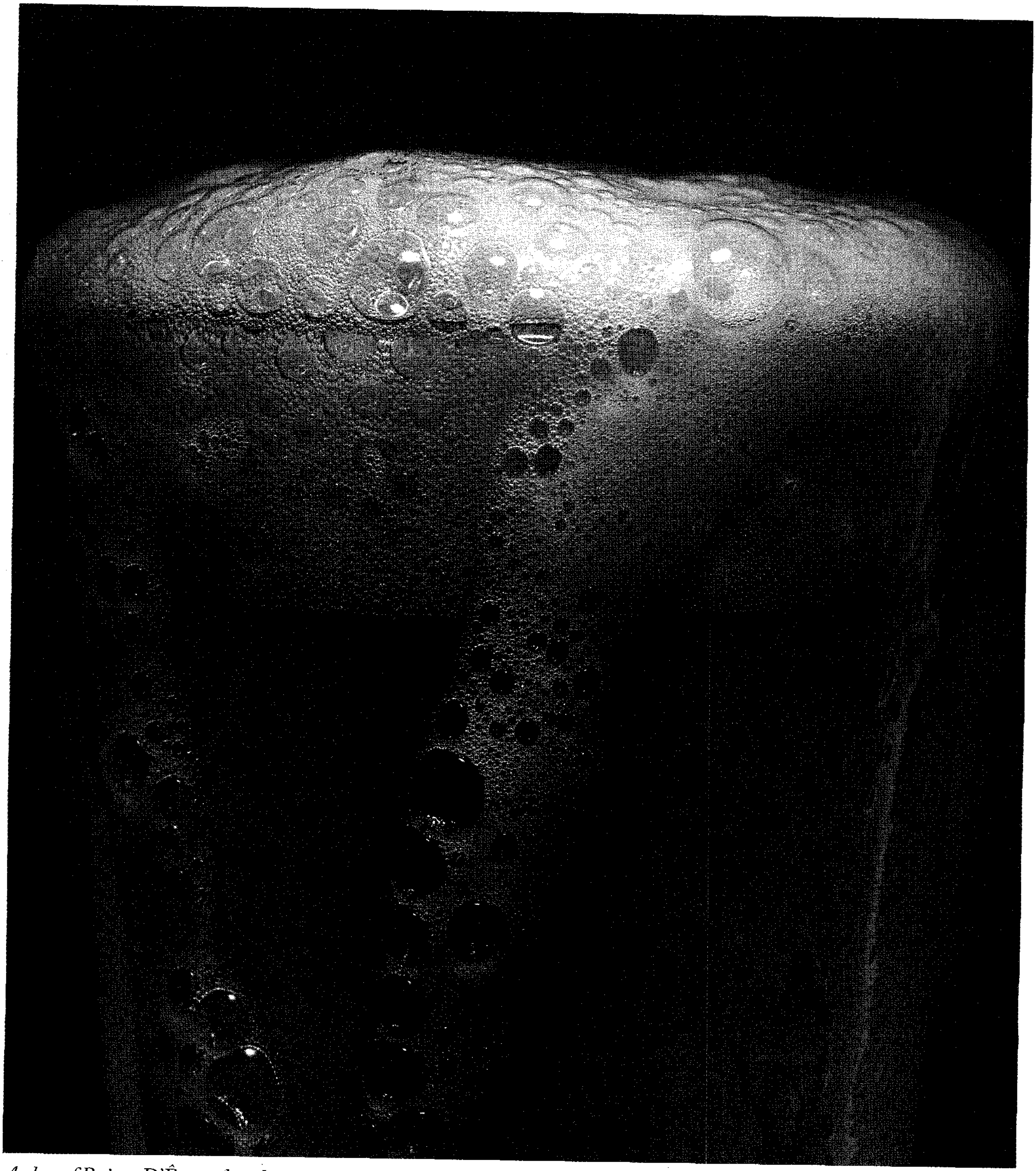
ANNALS OF DRINKING

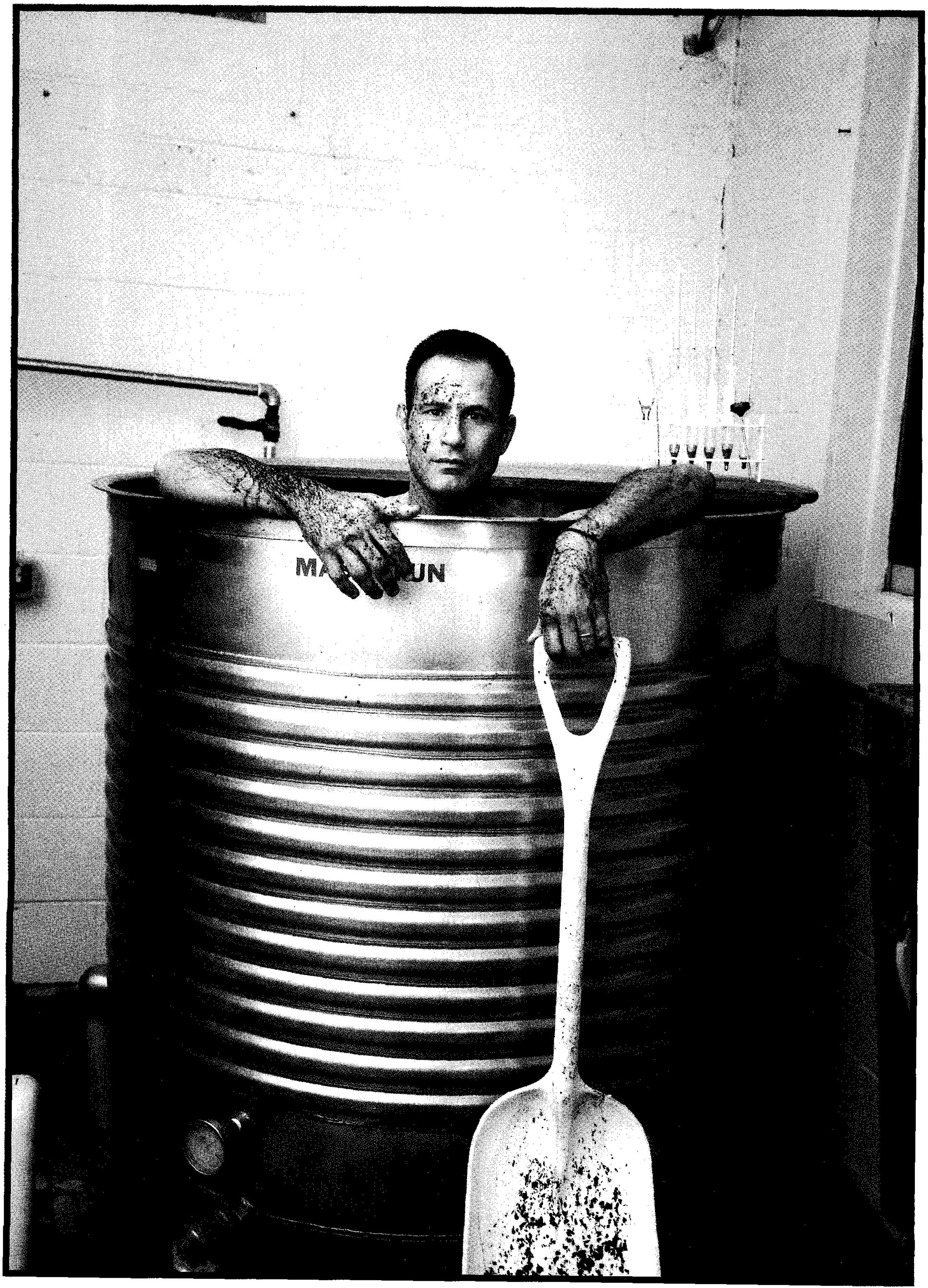
A BETTER BREW

The rise of extreme beer.

BY BURKHARD BILGER



A glass of Raison D'Être, a beer brewed with beet sugar and green raisins, by Dogfish Head. Photographs by Martin Schoeller.



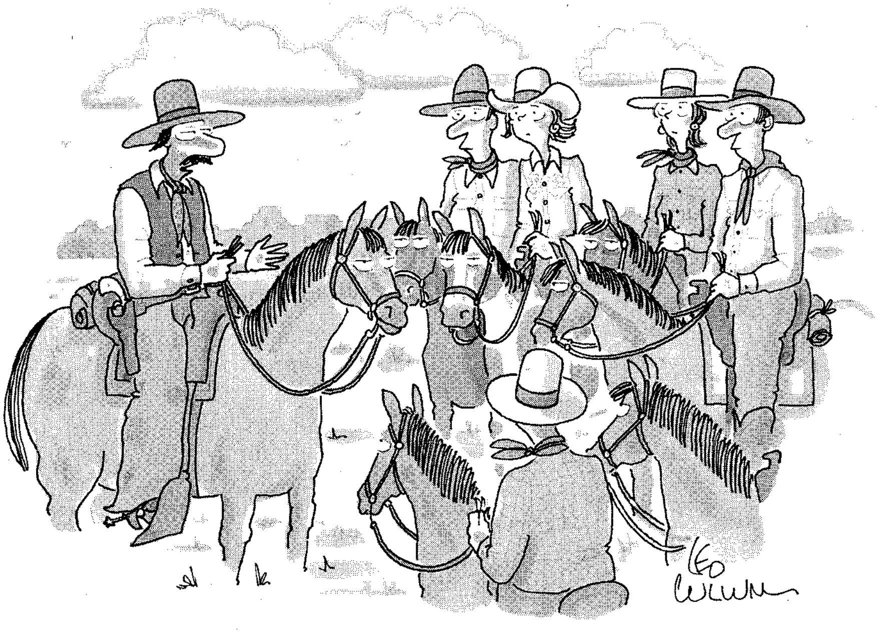
Sam Calagione at Dogfish breweries. "I'm frustrated that one beer has been hammered down people's throats," he says.

Elephants, like many of us, enjoy a good malted beverage when they can get it. At least twice in the past ten years, herds in India have stumbled upon barrels of rice beer, drained them with their trunks, and gone on drunken rampages. (The first time, they trampled four villagers; the second time they uprooted a pylon and electrocuted themselves.) Howler monkeys, too, have a taste for things fermented. In Panama, they've been seen consuming overripe palm fruit at the rate of ten stiff drinks in twenty minutes. Even flies have a nose for alcohol. They home in on its scent to lay their eggs in ripening fruit, insuring their larvae a pleasant buzz. Fruit-fly brains, much like ours, are wired for inebriation.

The seductions of drink are wound deep within us. Which may explain why, two years ago, when John Gasparine was walking through a forest in southern Paraguay, his thoughts turned gradually to beer. Gasparine is a businessman from Baltimore. He owns a flooring company that uses sustainably harvested wood and he sometimes goes to South America to talk to suppliers. On the trip in question, he had noticed that the local wood-carvers often used a variety called *palo santo*, or holy wood. It was so heavy that it sank in water, so hard and oily that it was sometimes made into ball bearings or self-lubricating bushings. It smelled as sweet as sandalwood and was said to impart its fragrance to food and drink. The South Americans used it for salad bowls, serving utensils, maté goblets, and, in at least one case, wine barrels.

Gasparine wasn't much of a wine drinker, but he had become something of a beer geek. (His thick eyebrows, rectangular glasses, and rapid-fire patter seem ideally suited to the parsing of obscure beverages.) A few years earlier, he'd discovered a bar in downtown Baltimore called Good Love that had several unusual beers on tap. The best, he thought, were from a place called Dogfish Head, in southern Delaware. The brewery's motto was "Off-Centered Ales for Off-Centered People." It made everything from elegant Belgian-style ales to experimental beers brewed with fresh oysters or arctic cloudberries. Gasparine decided to send a note to the owner, Sam Calagione. Dogfish was already aging some of its beer in oak barrels. Why not try something more aromatic, like palo santo?

Calagione was used to odd suggestions from customers. On Monday mornings, his brewery's answering machine is sometimes full of rambling meditations from fans, in the grips of beery enlightenment at their local bar. But Gasparine's idea was different. It spoke to Calagione's own contradictory ambitions for Dogfish: to make beers so potent and unique that they couldn't be judged by ordinary standards, and to win for them the prestige and premium prices usually reserved for fine wine. And so, a year later, Calagione sent Gasparine back to Paraguay with an order for forty-four hundred board feet of palo santo. "I told him to get a shitload," he remembers. "We were going to build the biggest wooden barrel since the days of Prohibition."



"Today we can help herd cattle, go on a nature hike, get a sauna and massage, or go into town and rob the bank."

Gasparine, by then, had begun to have second thoughts. No lumbermill he knew had ever cut so much palo santo, and he wasn't sure that any could. *Bulnesia sarmientoi* is a weedy, willowy tree, sometimes called ironwood. It's difficult to get large boards out of it, and even small ones can dull a saw blade. Wood experts rate a species' hardness on the Janka scale—a measure of how many pounds of force it takes to drive a half-inch steel ball halfway into a board. Yellow pine rates around seven hundred, oak twice as high. Palo santo hovers near forty-five hundred—three times as high as rock maple. It's one of the two or three hardest woods in the world.

Gasparine eventually found some Paraguayans willing to fill the order. On one trip, they took him to the forest where the palo santo grew, a twelve-hour bus ride from Asunción followed by a half day's drive into the wilderness. Three rough-looking millworkers had agreed to accompany him, led by a bullet-headed giant named Carlos. At one point, a herd of wild boars crossed the road, but Carlos didn't slow down. He plowed straight over a boar and kept on going.

When they finally arrived, one of the millworkers pulled out a large cooking knife. "He said he was going to prove to me that these were palo-santo trees," Gasparine remembers. " 'We'll cut away the bark and you can smell it!' Then he starts hacking away for five or ten minutes. Nothing. Can't get through the sapwood. So the monster Carlos goes at it. The blade looks like a butter knife in his hand. Nothing." After a while, Carlos turned to one of his sidekicks and sent him back to the truck. When he returned, he was holding a .38-calibre pistol. "Now I'm a little more than freaked out," Gasparine says. Carlos took the pistol, swivelled it toward the tree, and fired a single shot from five feet away. The bullet struck with a dull thud, then fell harmlessly to the ground.

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The barrel that Dogfish built is now housed at its main brewery, in Milton, Delaware. It's fifteen feet high and ten feet in diameter, and holds nine thousand gallons. When Calagione took me to see it in August, a pallet of left-over palo santo was stacked nearby. The staves, streaked with a greenish-brown grain, felt disproportionately heavy, as if subject to a stronger gravity—one part wood, one part white dwarf star. The barrel was built by a father-and-son firm in Buffalo, Calagione said, and cost about a hundred and forty thousand dollars—three times the price of the oak barrel beside it. "If Dogfish were a publicly traded company, I'd have been fired for building this," he said.

Calagione is thirty-nine. That day, as on most days, he was wearing flip-flops, cargo pants, and a threadbare T-shirt, and looked about as concerned with liquidity as the customers bellied up at the brewery's bar, drinking free samples. When tour groups visit Dogfish, they're greeted by a quote on the wall from Emerson's essay on self-reliance: "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist," it begins. "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." Calagione doesn't seem, at first, to fit this cantankerous creed. His nonconformity is of an agreeable sort: brewing beer, keeping his own hours, living by the shore with his high-school sweetheart and their two children. For a while after college, he did some modelling, and he still looks as if he belonged in, well, a Budweiser commercial. He has a surfer's loose, long-muscled frame and perpetual tan. His chiselled features are set in a squarish head and topped by a thick black ruff. When he talks, his lips twist slightly to the side and his voice comes out low and woolly, like a crooner's at a speakeasy. "Just get a whiff of that wood," he said.

I leaned forward and put my nose to the grain. The barrel was more than a year old, but the wood smelled freshly milled. A sharp, spicy, resinous scent came off it, like incense and mulled wine. To stand up to its aroma, Calagione said, he had filled the barrel with a strong brown beer. It was made with three kinds of hops, five kinds of wheat and barley, a dose of unrefined cane sugar, and a sturdy Scottish ale yeast. It had a creamy head when poured, like a Guinness stout, and contained about twelve per cent alcohol—two and a half times as much as a Budweiser. Calagione called it Palo Santo Marron. It was an extreme beer, he said, but to most people it wouldn't have tasted like beer at all. There were hints of tobacco and molasses in it, black cherries and dark chocolate, all interlaced with the wood's spicy resin. It tasted like some ancient elixir that the Inca might have made.

America used to be full of odd beers. In 1873, the country had some four thousand breweries, working in dozens of regional and ethnic styles. Brooklyn alone had nearly fifty. Beer was not only refreshing but nutritious, it was said—a "valuable substitute for vegetables," as a member of the United States Sanitary Commission put it during the Civil War. The lagers brewed by Adolphus Busch and Frederick Pabst were among the best. In 1878, Maureen Ogle notes in her recent book "Ambitious Brew: The Story of American Beer," Busch's St. Louis Lager took on more than a hundred European beers at a competition in Paris. The lager came home with the gold, causing an "immense sensation," in the words of a reporter from the *Times*.

Then came Prohibition, followed hard by industrialization. Beer went from barrel to bottle and from saloon to home refrigerator, and only the largest companies could afford to manufacture and distribute it. A generation raised on Coca-Cola had a hard time readjusting to beer's bitterness, and brewers diluted their recipes accordingly. In 1953, Miller High Life was dismissed by one competitor as a beer for "women and beginners." Within a decade, most other beers were just as flavorless.

Beer has lagged well behind wine and organic produce in the ongoing reinvention of American cuisine. Yet the change over the past twenty years has been startling. In 1965, the United States had a single craft brewery: Anchor Brewing, in San Francisco. Today, there are nearly fifteen hundred. In liquor stores and upscale supermarkets, pumpkin ales and chocolate stouts compete for cooler space with wit beers, weiss beers, and imperial Pilsners. The King of Beers, once served in splendid isolation at many bars, is now surrounded by motley bottles with ridiculous names, like jesters at a Renaissance fair: SkullSplitter, Old Leghumper, Slam Dunkel, Troll Porter, Moose Drool, Power Tool, He'brew, and Ale Mary Full of Taste.

Dogfish is something of a mascot for this unruly movement. In the thirteen years since Calagione founded the brewery, it has gone from being the smallest in the country to the thirty-eighth largest. Calagione makes more beer with at least ten per cent alcohol than any other brewer, and his odd ingredients are often drawn from ancient or obscure beer traditions. The typical Dogfish ale is made with about four times as much grain as an industrial beer (hence its high alcohol content) and about twenty times as much hops (hence its bitterness). It is to Budweiser what a bouillabaisse is to fish stock.

"We are trying to explore the outer edges of what beer can be," Calagione says. But the idea makes even some craft brewers nervous. "I find the term 'extreme beer' irredeemably pejorative," Garrett Oliver, the brewmaster at Brooklyn Brewery, told me recently. "When a brewer says, 'This has more hops in it than anything you've had in your life—are you man enough to drink it?,' it's sort of like a chef saying, 'This stew has more salt in it than anything you've ever had—are you man enough to eat it?' "

Dogfish makes some very fine beers, Oliver says. But its reputation has been built on ales like its 120 Minute I.P.A., one of the strongest beers of its kind in the world. I.P.A. stands for India pale ale, an especially hoppy British style first made in the eighteenth century for the long sea voyage to the subcontinent. (Hops are a natural preservative as well as a flavoring.) A typical I.P.A. has six per cent alcohol and forty I.B.U.s—brewers' parlance for international bittering units. Calagione's version has eighteen per cent alcohol and a hundred and twenty I.B.U.s. It's brewed for two hours, with continuous infusions of hops, then fermented with still more hops. "I don't find it pleasant to drink," Oliver says. "I find it unbalanced and shrieking."

Others find it thrilling. "When you're trying to create new brewing techniques and beer styles, you have to have a certain recklessness," Jim Koch, whose Boston Beer Company brews Samuel Adams, and who coined the term "extreme beer," told me. "Sam has that. He's fearless, but he's also got a good palate. He doesn't put stuff into beer that doesn't deserve to be there."

The debate goes back, in one form or another, nearly five hundred years. According to the Bavarian Reinheitsgebot, or Purity Law, of 1516, beer can be made with only three ingredients: water, hops, and barley. (Yeast was left off the list because brewers didn't know it existed; beer was naturally fermented, like sourdough bread.) German brewers still observe a version of the Reinheitsgebot, but Belgian brewers, just across the border, have cheerfully renounced it. Their krieks, wits, lambics, and gueuzes are among the world's most remarkable beers, yet they're often made with fruits or spices, or fortified with sugar, to become as potent as wine.

In America, brewers have long followed the German model: our major industrial breweries were all founded by German-Americans. But Calagione and others have lately wandered over to the Belgian side—and kept on going. "I'd probably be arrested, tarred and feathered, if I stepped off a plane in Berlin," Calagione told me. Extreme brewers have helped turn American brewing into the most influential in the world. But they've also raised a basic question: When does beer cease to be beer?

On my first night in Delaware, I found a manila folder waiting for me at my hotel. It was filled with printouts of an e-mail exchange from earlier that year, between Calagione and a brewer in Finland named Juha Ikonen. Calagione was trying to find ingredients for a rustic juniper-flavored beer known as *sahti*, which Finnish farmers began making as early as the ninth century. He had tried to get Ikonen to send him whole juniper branches with needles intact, so that he could lay them in the bottom of his brewing vessel. But Ikonen thought the branches might get moldy on the flight over. In the end, they'd settled on juniper berries, hand-picked in Finland two weeks earlier. "Welcome Burk," Cala-

THE BRIDGETOWER

per il Mulatto Brischdauer
gran pazzo e compositore mulattico
—Ludwig van Beethoven, 1803.

If was at the Beginning. If
he had been older, if he hadn't been
dark, brown eyes ablaze
in that remarkable face;
if he had not been so gifted, so young
a genius with no time to grow up;
if he hadn't grown up, undistinguished,
to an obscure old age.
If the piece had actually been,
as Kreutzer exclaimed, unplayable—even after
our man had played it, and for years,
no one else was able to follow—
so that the composer's fury would have raged
for naught, and wagging tongues
could keep alive the original dedication
from the title page he shredded.

Oh, if only Ludwig had been better-looking,
or cleaner, or a real aristocrat,
von instead of the unexceptional *van*
from some Dutch farmer; if his ears
had not already begun to squeal and whistle;
if he hadn't drunk his wine from lead cups,
if he could have found True Love. Then
the story would have held: In 1803
George Polgreen Bridgetower,

son of Friedrich Augustus the African Prince
and Maria Anna Sovinki of Biala in Poland,
travelled from London to Vienna,
where he met the Great Master,
who would stop work on his Third Symphony
to write a sonata for his new friend
to première triumphantly on May 24th,
whereupon the composer himself
leapt up from the piano to embrace
his "lunatic mulatto."

Who knows what would have followed?
They might have palled around some,
just a couple of wild and crazy guys
strutting the town like rock stars,
hitting the bars for a few beers, a few laughs . . .
instead of falling out over a girl
nobody remembers, nobody knows.

Then this bright-skinned papa's boy
could have sailed his fifteen-minute fame
straight into the record books—where,
instead of a Regina Carter or Aaron Dworkin or Boyd Tinsley
sprinkled here and there, we would find
rafts of black kids scratching out scales
on their matchbox violins so that someday
they might play the impossible:
Beethoven's Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47,
also known as the "Bridgetower."

—*Rita Dove*

gione had scrawled on the folder. "Tomorrow we are *so* brewing Sahtea (our version of Sahti). . . . See ya in the Inn Foyer @ 8:30. *Beers in the fridge."

The next morning, Calagione pulled up at the hotel in an old Dodge pickup truck. It looked like something out of "Paper Moon": bulbous fenders, pop-eyed headlamps, red paint weathered nearly to pink. On the tailgate, Calagione had stencilled a line adapted from William Carlos Williams: "So much depends on a red wheelbarrow." He had bought the truck from some firefighters in Rochester, he told me, and used it mostly as a family car. (Later that week, it would make an appearance at a "Touch the Truck!" event for toddlers.) But it was also handy for hauling supplies. In the back were a pitchfork, a large bag of Indian spices, and about twenty gray river rocks, collected by the brewery's maintenance man. What the rocks were for, I'd soon find out.

"Sam is a wonderful showman," Garrett Oliver told me. "He almost conceives the beer around the story. He'll think, Wouldn't it be cool if we carried the beer down the street and everyone put something new into it!" This is partly a matter of clever marketing and partly of a genuine creative temperament. Calagione has written or co-written three books on beer. He designs many of Dogfish's labels and cites Andy Warhol and Coco Chanel as inspirations—"that fusion of commercialism and art." The Emerson quote at the brewery's entrance is both an eloquent mission statement and a reminder, as Calagione told some Dogfish fans when I was there, to "keep on drinking the good shit!"

Like most craft brewers, Calagione came to beer from something else. He grew up in Greenfield, Massachusetts, the middle child of an oral surgeon and the heir to a long line of winemakers. His father and his uncle used to drive to Worcester to meet the trains that brought grapes from California. When they got home, and the juice had been stomped out in the basement, Sam would help bottle it. The process seems to have stripped him of any reverence toward the product. His forefathers worked hard making wine, he recently wrote, "so that I might have the opportunity to produce a superior beverage."

Calagione was a bright student and a scrappy athlete (to keep his weight up for the football team, his father made him eat a cheesesteak every night at ten-thirty). But by the spring of his senior year, at Northfield Mount Hermon prep, he had so many demerits that he was expelled. His offenses were of the usual Animal House variety: flipping a truck on campus; breaking into the skating rink and playing naked hockey; "surfing" on the roof of a Winnebago, going sixty miles per hour down I-91. As a junior, Calagione sometimes waited outside a local liquor store and got customers to buy him a case of beer. Back at school, he hid the bottles in his hockey bag and sold them to other students at a profit. "I remember when I got busted," he told me. "The dean said, 'You think you can make a living doing this?' I didn't have the foresight to say, 'Yeah, maybe someday.' "

He never did graduate from high school, though he went on to earn a bachelor's degree in English, at Muhlenberg College, in Pennsylvania. In 1992, he moved to Manhattan, to take writing classes at Columbia and work toward a Master of Fine Arts. It was there, while waiting tables at Nacho Mama's Burritos in Morningside Heights, that he had his first taste of craft beer. Emboldened by the home-brewing movement, and the success of beers like New Albion, Sierra Nevada, and Samuel Adams, more than two hundred craft breweries had opened in the previous decade, as well as swarms of microbreweries and brewpubs. (A craft brewery, according to the Brewers Association, is one that produces less than two million barrels a year; a microbrewery produces less than fifteen thousand; and a brewpub serves at least a quarter of its beer in house.) Before long, Calagione was brewing beer in his apartment—his first was a sour-cherry ale—and spending his afternoons at the New York Public Library, researching the beer industry.

"I looked around and saw three breweries basically ruling the United States," he told me. All but one per cent of the beer sold in the U.S. was still made by Miller, Coors, and Anheuser-Busch, along with mid-sized and foreign breweries such as Pabst and Heineken. And while craft breweries made wonderful beer, they were mostly focussed on classic German and British styles, such as pale ale and Pilsner. Calagione had something else in mind. "I'd read a copy of Michael Jackson's 'World Guide to Beer,' and I thought, Holy shit! There are people out there making beer with fruit! There are Scottish ales made with heather flowers! Maybe I can make a living making beer that isn't like anything else." It was an opportunity to play David to the beer industry's Goliaths, he says. "It was the same kind of thing that got me kicked out of prep school."

Dogfish Head Brewings and Eats, the pub that Calagione opened in 1995, sits on the main drag of Rehoboth Beach, on Delaware's southern shore. The pub's name comes from a peninsula in Maine where Calagione spent summers as a boy; its location was inspired by his wife, Mariah, who grew up nearby. (She's now co-owner of the brewery and its marketing director.) The property is only four blocks from the ocean, but was long considered snakebit. "Everyone said it was too far from the boardwalk," Calagione says. "This isn't Manhattan. People don't like to walk." Still, he liked the large parking lot and the shambling, open-raftered dining room. And he knew something the locals didn't: Delaware was one of the last eight states in the country without a brewery. Publicity alone, he thought, ought to keep the place afloat for a while. Or at least until he learned to make beer.

As it turned out, there was a reason that Delaware had no breweries like Calagione's. Prohibition had been over for sixty years, but it was still illegal for a pub to bottle and distribute its own beer. Calagione found this out not long after he'd signed the lease. Luckily, Delaware was also very small and very friendly to business. "I literally drove to Dover, asked which one is the House and which is the Senate, and started knocking on doors," he remembers. "They said, 'You want to do what, son? Well, write up a bill!' " Six months later, the governor signed the bill into law. The only hitch had come when Calagione was applying for his liquor license, and one of the commissioners brought up his recent arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol. Calagione admitted to the incident—a few weeks earlier, on his way home from a restaurant, he'd run into a parked car and dislocated his shoulder—but added a small correction. The actual infraction was a P.U.I., he said: pedalling under the influence. "Commissioner, I was on a bicycle."

The tavern was a success from the day it opened. The beer took a little longer. Calagione had brewed fewer than ten batches before coming to Delaware, and he rarely used the same recipe twice. "I'd just grab herbs and spices and fruits from the kitchen and throw them in," he says. "I used to think, Oh, it's cool that every batch tastes different. It's like snowflakes!" The pub's brewing equipment consisted of three fifteen-gallon kegs on propane burners, and a rack of modified kegs for fermenting the beer. To keep up with demand, Calagione had to brew two or three times a day, every day; between shifts he slept on a mattress in the cellar. When the beer was ready, he and two employees would don ski goggles and green garbage bags and bottle the beer by hand, with a siphon and mechanical capper. In ten hours they could fill a hundred cases.

"It was a hot ghetto mess," Bryan Selders, Dogfish's lead brewer, remembers. By the time Selders arrived, in 2002, Calagione had jury-rigged some larger kettles out of stainless-steel tanks from a yogurt factory. To reach the cooked barley, or mash, Selders had to climb onto a metal grate twelve feet high and straddle the edge of the boiling kettle—one foot on the grate, the other on the kettle's lid. Once, during a morning production meeting, Selders fell in. "The lid just gave way," he says. The mash in the kettle was hot—around a hundred and fifty degrees—but came only to the tops of his boots. "I went home, took a shower, watched a little Sally Jessy, and came back."

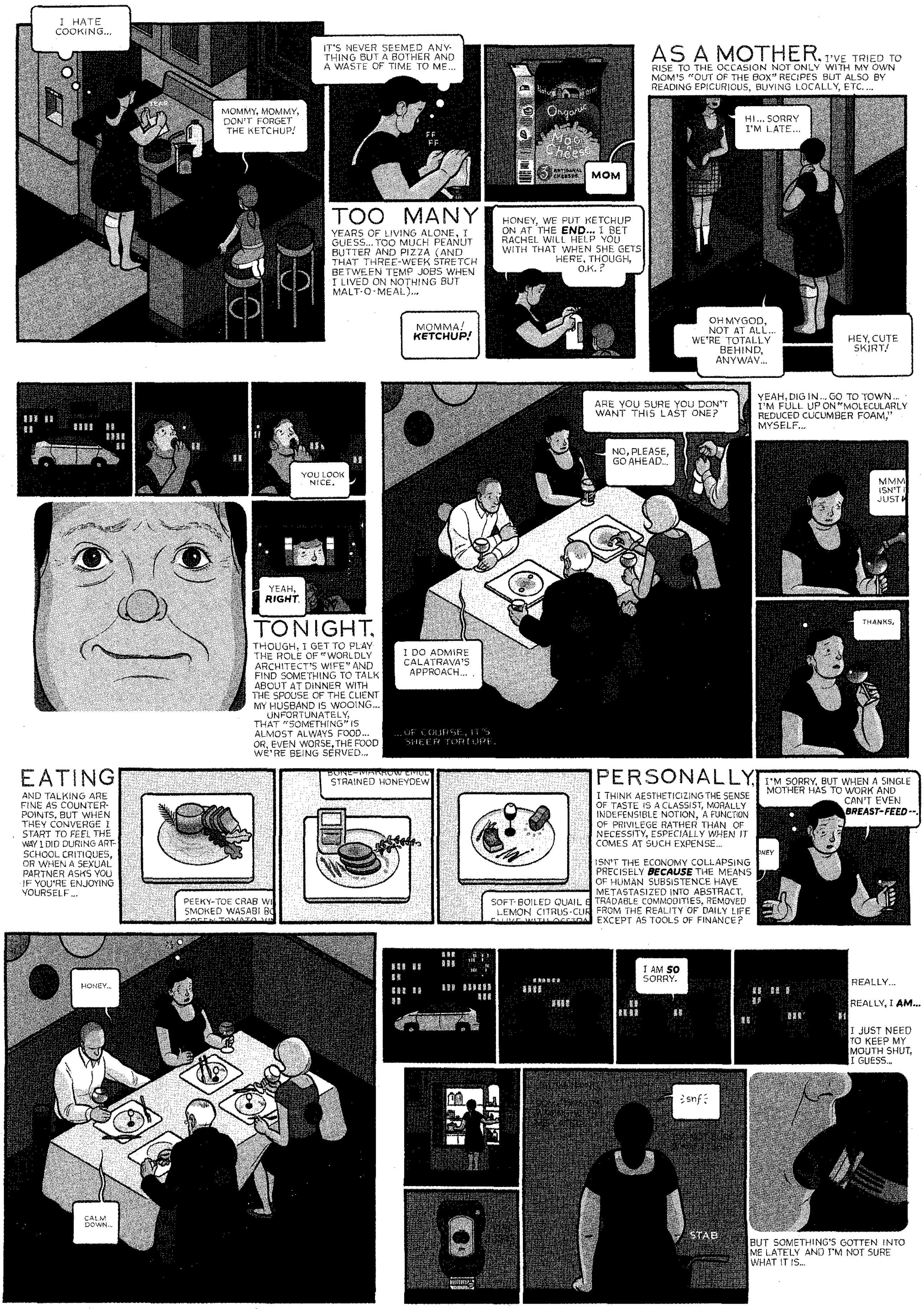
Dogfish was on the verge of bankruptcy for many of those years. More than seven hundred craft breweries opened in the United States between 1995 and 2000, yet their combined market share increased by less than a quarter. Some brewers were too inexperienced to make good beer—a 1996 issue of *Consumer Reports* found a number of the most expensive brands "flawed and stale-tasting"—others too cynical. Companies like Bad Frog simply contracted other breweries to make beer for them, then slapped on a silly label—in this case, a frog flipping off customers. The industrial breweries, meanwhile, were busy acquiring and buying shares in smaller companies (Celis, Shipyard, Red Hook, Widmer) or creating fake craft beers of their own: Blue Moon, Red Wolf, Eisbock, Elk Mountain. When most of those beers failed, their owners settled for squeezing craft brewers from the other side: paying bar owners and distributors to carry only their products. "It was economic Darwinism," Calagione says. "Supply finally overtook demand."

Dogfish's ragged beginnings were its saving grace, he says. "If we'd bought a turnkey brewhouse for three hundred thousand dollars, I have no doubt in my mind that we would have gone bust." The restaurant paid for the brewery at first, then the brewery grew as the beer improved. By working in small batches, Calagione became an experimental brewer a decade before it was fashionable. He made a medieval gruit with yarrow root and grains of paradise. He made an African *tej* with bitter gesho bark and raw honey. He made a stout with roasted chicory and St.-John's-wort ("The world's only antidepressant depressant," he called it). While other brewers were dyeing their beer green for St. Patrick's Day, Calagione brewed his with blue-green algae. "It tasted like appetizing pond scum," he says. "The first sip, you were like, 'Wow, that tasted like pond scum. But you know what? I kind of want a second sip.' "

His customers were forgiving, if not always enthusiastic. When Calagione bottled his first twelve-ounce beers for sale in New Jersey, he decided to celebrate with a publicity stunt. He would build a wooden boat and row the beer across Delaware Bay—a distance of eighteen nautical miles. "The idea was handmade beer from a handmade boat," he says. "But I forgot to get press releases out." When he arrived, there were four fans to greet him.

The turning point came in 1999, when Calagione was watching a cooking

COMIC STRIP BY CHRIS WARE


I HATE COOKING...
MOMMY, MOMMY, DON'T FORGET THE KETCHUP!
IT'S NEVER SEEMED ANYTHING BUT A BOTHER AND A WASTE OF TIME TO ME...
Organic Moo Cheese
3 ARTISANAL CHEESES
MOM
TOO MANY YEARS OF LIVING ALONE, I GUESS... TOO MUCH PEANUT BUTTER AND PIZZA (AND THAT THREE-WEEK STRETCH BETWEEN TEMP JOBS WHEN I LIVED ON NOTHING BUT MALT-O-MEAL)...
HONEY, WE PUT KETCHUP ON AT THE **END...** I BET RACHEL WILL HELP YOU WITH THAT WHEN SHE GETS HERE, THOUGH, O.K.?
MOMMA! **KETCHUP!**
AS A MOTHER, I'VE TRIED TO RISE TO THE OCCASION NOT ONLY WITH MY OWN MOM'S "OUT OF THE BOX" RECIPES BUT ALSO BY READING EPICURIOUS, BUYING LOCALLY, ETC. ...
HI... SORRY I'M LATE...
OH MYGOD, NOT AT ALL... WE'RE TOTALLY BEHIND, ANYWAY...
HEY, CUTE SKIRT!
YOU LOOK NICE.
YEAH, **RIGHT.**
TONIGHT, THOUGH, I GET TO PLAY THE ROLE OF "WORLDLY ARCHITECT'S WIFE" AND FIND SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT AT DINNER WITH THE SPOUSE OF THE CLIENT MY HUSBAND IS WOOING... UNFORTUNATELY, THAT "SOMETHING" IS ALMOST ALWAYS FOOD... OR, EVEN WORSE, THE FOOD WE'RE BEING SERVED...
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT THIS LAST ONE?
NO, PLEASE, GO AHEAD...
I DO ADMIRE CALATRAVA'S APPROACH...
...OF COURSE, IT'S SHEER TORTURE.
YEAH, DIG IN... GO TO TOWN... I'M FULL UP ON "MOLECULARLY REDUCED CUCUMBER FOAM," MYSELF...
MMM ISN'T I JUST
THANKS.
EATING AND TALKING ARE FINE AS COUNTERPOINTS, BUT WHEN THEY CONVERGE I START TO FEEL THE WAY I DID DURING ART-SCHOOL CRITIQUES, OR WHEN A SEXUAL PARTNER ASKS YOU IF YOU'RE ENJOYING YOURSELF...
PEEKY-TOE CRAB WI SMOKED WASABI BO
STRAINED HONEYDEW
SOFT-BOILED QUAIL E LEMON CITRUS-CUR
PERSONALLY, I THINK AESTHETICIZING THE SENSE OF TASTE IS A CLASSIST, MORALLY INDEFENSIBLE NOTION, A FUNCTION OF PRIVILEGE RATHER THAN OF NECESSITY, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES AT SUCH EXPENSE...
ISN'T THE ECONOMY COLLAPSING PRECISELY **BECAUSE** THE MEANS OF HUMAN SUBSISTENCE HAVE METASTASIZED INTO ABSTRACT, TRADABLE COMMODITIES, REMOVED FROM THE REALITY OF DAILY LIFE EXCEPT AS TOOLS OF FINANCE?
I'M SORRY, BUT WHEN A SINGLE MOTHER HAS TO WORK AND CAN'T EVEN **BREAST-FEED**--
NEY
HONEY...
CALM DOWN...
I AM **SO** SORRY.
REALLY...
REALLY, I **AM...**
I JUST NEED TO KEEP MY MOUTH SHUT, I GUESS...
snf
STAB
BUT SOMETHING'S GOTTEN INTO ME LATELY AND I'M NOT SURE WHAT IT IS...

show on television. The chef, who was making a soup, was saying that several grindings of pepper, added to the pot at different points, would give the dish more flavor than a single dose added at the beginning. Not long afterward, at a Salvation Army store, Calagione came across an old electric football set—the kind with a playing field that vibrates to send miniature players skittering across it. Back at home, he found a five-gallon bucket and drilled some holes in the bottom. He laid a pair of wooden blocks on the football set, put the bucket on the blocks, and strapped the whole thing together with duct tape. ("Pretty high-tech M.I.T. stuff," he says.) Later, when his kettle was boiling, he put hops in the bucket, perched his contraption at a slant above the kettle, and set the game vibrating. Soon, a steady stream of hops was falling through the bucket onto the playing field and sliding into the kettle.

The beer born of that experiment, known as 60 Minute I.P.A., is still Calagione's biggest seller. He calls it a beer geek's idea of a "session beer"—mild enough to be consumed in quantity, but with an unexpected kick. It has the bright, citrusy bouquet of a much hoppier brew, without the bitterness. *Wine Enthusiast* tasted hints of rose petal, tangerine, orange zest, and nutmeg in it, and rated it a "classic."

The extreme-beer era was under way.

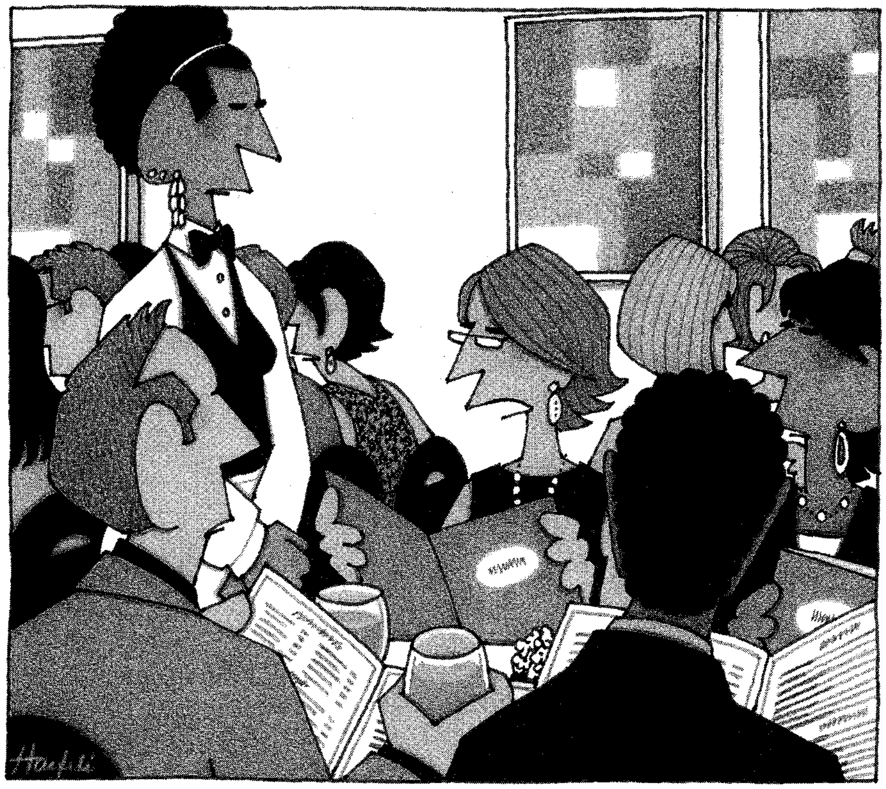
The pub in Rehoboth is now a proper experimental brewery. Although most of Dogfish's beer is made at its large modern facility in Milton, twenty minutes away, Calagione and his staff use the old equipment once a month to try out new recipes. "I need my brewers to be able to blow off steam," he told me, as we were driving to the pub that morning to make the Finnish *sahti*. If he had to brew the same beer every day, he said, he knew how he'd feel. He cocked his forefinger and put it to his temple.

The experimental beers are served on tap in the pub, at festivals, and at beer dinners that Calagione hosts around the country. Dogfish still doesn't advertise, aside from a few small notices in industry magazines, relying instead on word of mouth from "beer evangelists," as Calagione calls them. Whenever a beer is released, he monitors the chatter on Internet forums like BeerAdvocate and RateBeer. If he has a hit, and it's not too expensive to produce (the arctic-cloudberry ale averaged out to about nineteen dollars a snifter), he has Bryan Selders reformulate it for the larger brewery.

Selders arrived about an hour after we did, driving a van filled with sacks of grain. He was wearing what looked like a gas-station attendant's uniform, with his name stitched over one front pocket and the Dogfish logo over the other. His hair was gelled into a miniature Mohawk—more Tintin than Billy Idol—and his eyes, framed by thick black glasses, wore their usual look of ironic bewilderment. Selders, who is thirty-three, was a painter and ska guitarist before he became a brewer. When he and Calagione aren't making beer, they sometimes perform together at the pub as a beer-themed hip-hop duo called the Pain Relievaz (sample lyrics: "You're the barley virgin that my malt mill will deflour"). At work, they maintain an amiably fractious relationship, built on a role reversal of sorts. Selders plays the boss, the beleaguered perfectionist, searching for efficiencies and citing studies from brewing journals; Calagione plays the wayward talent, sloppy but charismatic and, occasionally, inspired. "I'm a little scared of this project, to be honest with you," Selders told me, as he was lugging the grain into the brewhouse. "Sam's ideas . . . the execution doesn't always match the theory."

Every beer is a brewer's invention to some degree—a combination of ingredients that could never be found in nature. A barrel of crushed grapes, left to its own devices, can turn into a crude sort of Beaujolais nouveau. The winemaker's job is mostly to prod the process along. That isn't true of beer. For grain to turn into an ale or lager, it has to be malted, cooked, strained, cooked, strained, fermented in a barrel, and sometimes again in a bottle. "Mother Nature makes wine," Calagione likes to say. "Brewers make beer."

Which isn't to say that beer is any less natural, or less subject to nature's vagaries. One year, a drought in the Dakotas may leave the barley with half its usual starch. The next, a hot summer in the Yakima Valley could turn the hops less bitter. The water in the mash may be hard or soft (Bavarian water is great for dark lagers, not so good for pale ales), the fermentation tanks sealed tight or exposed to the open air. And at the end of the process lies a notoriously finicky organism. All brewing yeasts eventually run out of sugar or self-destruct, poisoning



"I want to leave myself some caloric margin of error for dessert."

themselves on their own alcohol. Only the hardiest strains—"freaks of nature," Calagione calls them—can produce the most potent beers. Dogfish has its own yeast-propagation lab, but some strains give up too soon, causing what's known as a stuck fermentation. "Our brewery is a hundred people relying on a few billion yeast cells," Calagione says. "Sometimes they outvote us."

There's no reason, given all these variables, that a given beer should always taste the same. We expect a Merlot to change from year to year, crop to crop. Why not a Michelob? Beer has been an industrial commodity for so long that it no longer seems an organic substance. And brewing, in its complexity, allows just enough control to maintain the illusion. If winemakers are Dionysian, brewers have had to become Apollonian. Age will only improve a Bordeaux, winemakers say. Brewers tend to prefer their beer fresh, exactly as they made it. Their skill lies in compensating for nature as much as collaborating with it.

"Someday, son, this will all belong to the Chinese."

• •

Then again most brewers don't make beer with rocks. When *sahti* was first brewed, in the Middle Ages, Calagione told me, Finnish farmers used wooden kettles. The wood couldn't be set directly on a fire, so the brewers heated up rocks and threw them into the mash, caramelizing the barley and giving it a smoky flavor. Calagione wanted to use the same method, but he wasn't sure that he had the right material. "I told my maintenance guy to get rocks without a lot of quartz in them," he said. "Otherwise, when they get hot, they'll explode in your face."

The brewhouse was a cinder-block mudroom to the side of the building, with a trio of blackened kettles inside. When Selders had dumped the grain into the mash kettle—three hundred and fifty pounds of malted Pilsner barley and fifty-five pounds of rye—Calagione loaded the rocks from the truck into a wheelbarrow and rolled them into the kitchen. The pub's menu was designed around a wood-fired grill, used to cook burgers, steaks, seafood, and beer-battered pizza. (The beef came from cows fed on the brewery's spent grain.) Calagione strapped on a pair of safety glasses and peered into the oak and hickory embers. "If there are no second-degree burns, I'll call this a success," he said. Then he heaved in a rock, sending up a shower of sparks. "Let me know if they start to explode," he told one of the cooks.

The grain had been cooked to mash by now, and a thick, lacy foam had bubbled to the surface. It was here that A. E. Housman's famous lines—"Malt does more than Milton can / To justify God's ways to man"—were borne out. When grain is partially sprouted, it builds up enzymes that can break down starch and turn it into sugar. In a living seed, this sugar fuels the plant's growth. In beer, it's digested by yeast, producing alcohol. The foam on the mash was a sign that the enzymes were at work. After an hour or so, the malty liquid, known as wort, would be strained off and cooked again with hops and flavorings. (Malt and hops are the yin and yang of beer: the one sweet, the other bitter.) Once it cooled, the yeast would go in, and the beer would be left to ferment, producing an array of flavor compounds in addition to alcohol: peppery phenols, fruity esters, and so on. "Beer is all about what your yeast is doing," Selders said.

The year before, Selders had taken some wort intended for 60 Minute I.P.A., divided it into four batches, and added a different yeast to each. "They turned into four completely different beers," he said. His favorite was made with a German Kölsch strain, used in the delicate straw-colored ales of Cologne. For the *sahti*, Calagione had decided on a *Hefeweizen* strain instead. He had read that Finnish brewers used baker's yeast to make a spicy but slightly chalky beer. The *Hefeweizen* yeast would provide similar hints of clove and banana, he hoped, "but without the weirdness."

When the mash had been cooking for a while, Selders climbed onto a stool and took a temperature reading: a hundred and fifty-five degrees. "We're ready for the rocks," he said. Calagione grabbed his pitchfork and hurried back to the kitchen. Inside the stove, the rocks were white-hot. A few had burst apart, though not loudly enough to alarm the cooks: the kitchen radio was turned up high, to Bob Dylan braying over a squall of Gypsy violin. Calagione stabbed his pitchfork into the flames and lifted out a rock balanced on the tines. "This is going to be an adventure," he said, dumping it into the wheelbarrow with a clang.

Soon, he and the pub's manager, Jason, were running back and forth between the brewhouse and the stove, carrying rocks in oven mitts or between metal plates. As the rocks plopped into the mash, they sent up jets of steam and glutinous bubbles, until the whole kettle was boiling. Calagione stripped off his mitts, now charred beyond use, and threw them to the ground. His face was bright red and sheened with sweat. "When we do this next year, at the big brewery, we'll use the rocks outside in a small tank," he said. "Then we'll mix that mash in with the rest inside."

Selders rolled his eyes. "Yes...it is already done," he said, wiggling his fingers as if casting a spell. Later, when I asked what he thought about Calagione's plan, he shook his head. "Yeah. Not going to happen." But Calagione overheard him. "They didn't want to do continual hopping, either!" he said.

The last stage of the brewing process was the most unorthodox. Traditionally, *sahti* is flavored with juniper alone, but Calagione wanted something more unusual. After the hops and the juniper berries had been added to the wort, he took the bag of spices from his truck and steeped it in a bucket of hot water. The mixture contained cardamom, coriander, ginger, allspice, rampe leaves, lemongrass, curry powder, and black tea, custom blended for Calagione in India. It would be added at the last moment, he said, so that its volatile flavors wouldn't boil off. The idea was to amplify the already spicy flavors of the juniper berries and the *Hefeweizen* yeast—to turn the *sahti* into Sahtea.

Selders walked over to the bucket and crouched down beside it. He took a wooden spoon and trailed it through the inky gunk. "You want to use all of this?" he said. "Because this is a lot of tea, dude."

Calagione nodded, a little sheepishly. "We'll see. We might want to use all of it."

Selders stared at the tea. He lifted a spoonful to his nose and took a cautious sniff. "So you went with curry, huh?"

"Nowhere near as much as I did with coriander and lemongrass."

"My God."

Restraint can have its advantages. A well-made German beer is both tasty and relatively wholesome: in Bavaria, it's considered a foodstuff and included in soldiers' rations. It's unlikely to give you a headache, upset your stomach, or cause an allergic reaction, as the acids and biological amines in Belgian lambics may, and it can have a surprising range of flavors—from sweet *Helles* to dark *Doppelbock* to smoky *Rauchbier*. The strictures of the Reinheitsgebot have helped turn German brewers into the most resourceful and technically capable in the world. By mixing and matching strains of yeast, varieties of hops, and pale or roasted grains, they can produce almost any flavor found in fruit or spice. With three ingredients, they can give the illusion of a dozen.

The same discipline, if not creativity, has helped make Budweiser the most popular beer in the world. Its sheer consistency, across tens of billions of bottles and cans, is a technical marvel, and even the crankiest craft brewers harbor a secret admiration for it. When I was in Belgium recently, I visited the Trappist monastery at Orval, near the French Ardennes. Orval is home to one of the world's great beers: a dry, earthy, multilayered concoction made with brewer's yeast and a wild strain called *Brettanomyces*. The monastery is circled by sandstone walls like a medieval fortress (it was founded in the twelfth century and rebuilt in the nineteen-twenties), but its brewery is as high tech as any I've seen. From the grain bins in the attic to the onion-domed copper kettles on the middle floors to the fermentation tanks in the basement, the operation is largely gravity-driven and computer-controlled—an android in a monk's robe.

I asked the brewmaster, Jean-Marie Rock, which American beer he likes best. He thought for a moment, squinting down his bladelike nose, and narrowed his lips to a point. Then he raised a finger in the air. "Budweiser!" he said. "Tell them that the brewer at Orval likes Budweiser!" He smiled. "I know they detest it, but it is quite good." Later, though, when he described the newest beers coming out of Belgium, they sounded a good deal closer to Calagione's. "People would rather pay a little more and have a special product than to pay a lot for a Pilsner and have something banal," he said. "I like Budweiser, but I wouldn't pay two euros for a Budweiser."

Even at Dogfish, the line between high end and low, industrial and craft, can get blurry. As Selders was piping the cooked wort into the fermentation tank that day, he turned to Calagione and me with a grin. "Is everyone excited about Budweiser American Ale?" he said. "It's going to taste great!" Calagione gave him a flat, brooding look. He knew he was being baited. Anheuser-Busch had been advertising its newest product all summer, clearly targeting the craft-beer market. Like other ales, the new beer is brewed at a relatively high temperature with a top-fermenting yeast. It's a little fruitier and more full-flavored than regular Budweiser, which, like all lagers, is brewed at a lower temperature with a bottom-fermenting yeast. In regular Budweiser, the bitterness of the hops is kept "at the threshold of perception," in Garrett Oliver's words. American Ale has more of a bite, thanks to a dose of whole Cascade hops—a craft-brewer favorite—that's added to the beer during a second fermentation.

"Those people know what they're doing," Selders said, goading Calagione. "What, you don't think it's true?"

"I think they can make a technically correct beer. But I don't even want to try it."

"As a brewer, you're obligated to try it."

"To give you some context for why it's so distasteful to me," Calagione said. "At the same time that they're making this relatively hoppy wanna-be craft beer that exists only to confuse the consumer—so that they can be culture vultures—they are running ads that say that the darker a beer is the more impurities it has. It's beer racism."

"Beer racism!"

"You don't see the hypocrisy in that?"

"I see it. But if you are going to take that stance you shouldn't shop at Food Lion, shouldn't go to Borders, shouldn't do any of that stuff."

Calagione shrugged and grabbed a shovel, then climbed into the kettle and began scooping out the spent mash. He liked to frame his business as an epic battle between small, stouthearted brewers and their evil industrial overlords. But his loyalty to craft beer was more in the manner of a guy who has rooted for the underdog all his life. (His own football teams, in junior high and high school, had a combined record of 0–72–2). "Look," he told me later. "I'm not afraid to pay compliments where compliments are due. Anheuser-Busch's quality—if quality is consistency—is second to none. But I'm frustrated that that one beer has been hammered down people's throats. I mean, banana cream pie may be your favorite fucking food. But if you ate banana cream pie every day you would hate it, too."

Every year at the end of the summer, Calagione throws a bocce tournament in Milton, on the brewery's two oyster-shell courts. "Bocce's an Italian thing," he says. "But it's also a sport that you can play without putting down your beer." The tournament culminates in the evening, when a large catapult is rolled out onto the lawn. The catapult was built by Frank Payton, the same maintenance man who found the river rocks for the *sahti*, and was designed to hurl pumpkins—a fall tradition in Delaware. In this case, it's armed with thirty cans of industrial beer and fired, with a precision born of years of practice, into a gargantuan sculpture of a toilet a hundred yards away. "We tried to throw a keg once," Calagione told me. "But it misfired and knocked down a street lamp."

The event evokes earlier, wackier days, but its anti-establishment vibe can seem a little at odds with the rather large factory beside it. Dogfish now sells about twenty-five million bottles' worth of beer a year. It has almost quadrupled in size since 2004, but still can't meet demand: about a fifth of its orders go unfilled. Calagione's salvaged kettles have been replaced by a state-of-the-art brewery, his ski goggles and garbage bags by an automated bottle-filling line and a three-person microbiology department. (Every beer is tested forty times per batch, including blind tastings in a sensory lab.) When the facility expanded last year, the roof had to be cut open so that a crane could drop in nine new three-story tanks. Well before that, the brewery's wastewater had overwhelmed the town's sewage system: the yeasts in it were outcompeting the bacteria used for waste treatment. The water is now trucked out several times a day and sprayed on local farms.

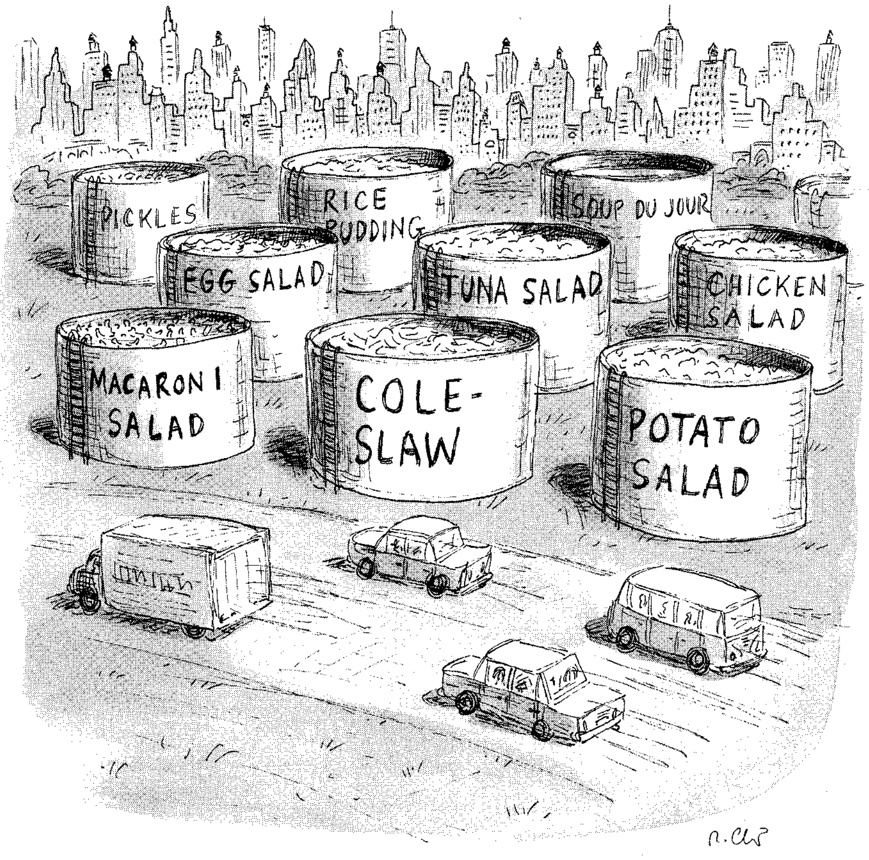
"Sam is the Adolphus Busch of his generation," the beer historian Maureen Ogle told me. But he has plenty of rivals. Koch's Boston Beer Company, for one, still makes twenty-five times more beer. The Darwinian beer wars of the past decade have tended to leave the best brewers standing. While sales of wine and spirits grew by between two and four per cent last year, craft-beer sales grew by twelve per cent. "Part of what we're seeing is a return to normality," Garrett Oliver told me. "It's weird for a country of three hundred million to have one kind of beer. But we're getting back to what we had before—and unless we go into a deep depression it's never going back."

Oliver, who is forty-six and black, with a trim beard and a resonant voice, has done his best to become the respectable face of craft brewing—its Orson Welles. While Calagione wears jeans and a rumpled shirt even on the "Today" show, Oliver attends almost every event in a jacket and tie. One blazer bears the Brooklyn Brewery logo, woven in steel by the same tailors who stitch crests for the British Royal Family, and his beers have some of the same suavity. "From what I've seen, a lot of people still think of us as kids playing with toys," he told me. "So anything I can do to ennoble beer is worthwhile, whether dressing up the packaging or dressing up for a beer dinner."

For all its success, craft beer has yet to reach the mainstream. Ninety-six per cent of the market—about sixty-seven billion bottles a year—still belongs to non-craft beers and imports. Oliver remembers talking to a brewer at Anheuser-Busch a few years ago, when sales of Michelob had fallen to about a third of a billion bottles a year. "He told me, 'I wish that brand would just die.' And that one beer was the size of the entire American craft-brewing industry." The disparity is partly a function of poor marketing, Ogle argues—craft brewers are still preaching to the converted—and partly of cultural conditioning. Until more Americans wean themselves from ketchup, soda, and other sweet foods, they may never enjoy the taste of hops. "When I talk to people like Sam, I'm constantly amazed at how persuaded they are that everyone drinks craft beer," she says. "If that's true, why are they still sitting at four per cent?"

In a decade's time, Oliver believes, breweries like his could claim a quarter of the market. (Paul Gatza, director of the Brewers Association, predicts something closer to ten per cent in twenty years.) But only if they don't scare people off first. "The whole idea of extreme beer is bad for craft

THE COFFEE-SHOP VATS OF NEW JERSEY



SPEEDY FAST FOOD
ZIEGLER

"I can have them cook that for you, but, if I do, it won't be speedy fast."

• •

brewing," Oliver says. "It doesn't expand the tent—it shrinks it. If I want someone to taste a beer, and I make it sound outlandish and crazy, there is a certain kind of person who will say, 'Oh, let me try it.' But that is a small audience. It's one that you can build a beer on, but not a movement."

Late one morning, Calagione and I drove to Philadelphia to see an archeological chemist he knows named Patrick McGovern. Calagione looked washed out and a little crotchety—a rare thing—after one too many glasses of grappa the night before. When I mentioned Oliver's misgivings to him, he smirked, as if hearing them for the hundredth time. "Garrett and I are good friends, but we definitely disagree on this," he said. "It's a purist versus populist position. If all of our palates are subjective, who am I and who is Garrett to decide whether there's too much hops in a beer, or whether you should be putting lemongrass or rampe leaves in it? As long as it finds an audience, it's valid."

Extreme beer is a return to normality, too, Calagione believes. It's just the normality of a thousand years ago, or several thousand, rather than a hundred. If the Reinheitsgebot is still the touchstone for most American brewers, Calagione's is a bronze bowl from King Midas' tomb.

The historical Midas was a Phrygian ruler in what is now central Turkey. When he or one of his close relatives was buried, around 730 B.C., the tomb was filled with more than a hundred and fifty drinking vessels—parting toasts to the dead king. By the time they were excavated, in 1957, the liquid inside them had evaporated. But Patrick McGovern, forty years later, was able to analyze some residue from a bowl and identify its chemical content. By matching the compounds to those found in the foods and spices of ancient Turkey, McGovern gradually pieced together the liquid's main ingredients: honey, barley, and grapes, and a yellow substance that was probably saffron. It was a beer, but like none we've ever tasted.

"Beer is a much older concept than the Reinheitsgebot," McGovern told us later, at the University of Pennsylvania. He was sitting at a chipped metal desk in his basement office at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, surrounded by sagging bookshelves and dusty lab equipment: a furnace, a microscale, a spectrometer, a liquid chromatograph. Here and there, chunks of pottery and other artifacts were wrapped in plastic or aluminum foil and stuffed in file drawers or ratty cardboard cases. "You're taking nine thousand years of brewing history and just looking at the last five hundred years of it," he said.

McGovern is a wizardly figure with a long white beard and large glasses that seem to draw his eyes together at the inner corners. He has a quiet but penetrating voice, a sharp wit, and a near total lack of pretension. (When brewing at Dogfish, he has been known to pour himself a chicory stout for breakfast.) He and Calagione first met eight years ago, at a dinner in honor of Michael Jackson, the great British beer writer. McGovern had recently published his findings on King Midas and was hoping to convince someone to make a modern-day replica of the beverage. (Anchor Brewing had done something similar a few years earlier, when it made a beer based on an ancient Sumerian hymn to the beer goddess, Ninkasi.) As it turned out, several brewers took up the challenge and sent beers to his house over the next few months. "Some were pretty good," he says. "But Dogfish Head's was the best."

Midas Touch, as it was later called, has a brilliant rose-gold color—every batch contains about a thousand dollars' worth of saffron—and a thick, honeyed, spicy flavor: a cross between beer, mead, and wine. It has become Dogfish's most decorated drink, winning a gold medal at the Great American Beer Festival, another gold at the International Mead Festival, and a silver at the World Beer Cup. "I look at beers like these as an opportunity to drink history," Calagione said. "They're liquid time capsules."

Earlier that summer, he and McGovern had brewed their most recent project: Theobroma, or "food of the gods." It was based on Mayan and Aztec ceremonial drinks, and on residues of the earliest known fermented cacao beverage, found in Honduran pots from between 1400 and 1100 B.C. It contained cocoa nibs, ancho chilies, honey, barley, and annatto seeds. "I kept complaining that it needs more chocolate," McGovern said. "I wanted to make it more reddish, because it was equated with blood and human sacrifice." Calagione laughed, saying, "And I told him, 'O.K., I'll get back to you on that.'"

Beer is less ancient than wine, McGovern went on to say, because it requires more technology: agriculture to grow the grain, fire and kettles to cook it. But, once invented, it quickly spread. “It wasn’t just in one part of the world,” he said. “It was all over.” If wine was rare and therefore aristocratic—it could be made only once a year, when fruit was ripe—beer trickled down to the working class. All you needed was a little malted grain and something bitter to balance its sweetness. Before barley became the grain of choice, brewers used millet and rice. Even after hops were domesticated, around 700 A.D., they threw in wormwood, henbane, cowslip, ivy, mugwort, bog myrtle, elderberry, oak leaf, laurel leaf, autumn crocus, or wild rosemary. Some plants were poisonous, most were not, and they gave the beer an endless variety of flavors.

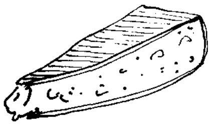
The Reinheitsgebot, when Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria imposed it in 1516, had less to do with keeping peasants from poisoning themselves—never a great concern of the gentry—than with controlling the hops and barley crops. It made a virtue of trade restrictions. And beer, that great bouillabaisse of an invention, became nearly as predictable as wine.

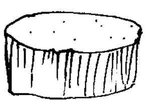
Extreme brewers are doing their best to help it devolve. This past October, I joined Calagione at the Great American Beer Festival, in Denver, for the première of his Sahtea and Theobroma. The festival was founded in 1982 by a home brewer named Charlie Papazian, when its title still sounded like an oxymoron. “That’s a great idea, Charlie,” Michael Jackson told Papazian, in so many words. “Only what will you serve for beer?” Twenty-six years later, more than eighteen hundred beers were on tap at the Denver convention center. A vast hangar had been divided into booths for four hundred and thirty breweries, grouped by geographic region. Anheuser-Busch, Coors, and Miller had their usual elaborate stage sets, and most beers followed the classic German and English styles. Still, the night belonged to extreme beer.

Wandering through the hall in the hour before it opened, I saw signs for beers called Goat Toppler, Chicken Killer, and Old Headwrecker, Incinerator, Detonator, Skull Annihilator, and the Obamanator. Many were double I.P.A.s that seemed to be competing for the highest I.B.U. rating. But others were faithful re-creations of ancient recipes, or else beers invented from whole cloth. “When you’re making an extreme beer, it’s like pushing beyond the sound barrier,” Jim Koch told me. “All of a sudden, everything is silent. I remember when I first tasted my Triple Bock. It dawned on me that beer has been around for thousands of years, and I am tasting something that no brewer has ever tasted. It was inspiring, beautiful, almost reverential.” Even Garrett Oliver seemed to be bowing to the trend. His booth featured two wonderful bottle-fermented ales and a pale ale called BLAST!, with eight kinds of English and American hops. “No, this is NOT a double I.P.A.,” a sign beneath the tap read. “Even if you believe in those.”

The festival was sold out for the first time. Over the next few days, some twenty-eight thousand attendees would pay fifty dollars for a wristband and a small plastic glass for tasting samples. The outcome was predictable. When the doors were flung open at five-thirty, six thousand people barrelled in and began drinking immediately, in great quantity. They wandered around in Viking horns, jester bells, and hats shaped like foaming steins, their bellies jutting from beer-themed T-shirts. One shirt showed Jesus hoisting a frothy mug with the caption “King of the Brews.” To make sure that the noise stayed near the shattering point, a bagpipe ensemble roamed the hall, blasting fanfares at unexpected moments. Whenever there was a lull, some oaf would drop his glass on the concrete floor and the entire assembly—as per tradition—would erupt into an epic whoop.

“It’s *amazing* how well people behave, given how many are here and how much alcohol there is,” Bob Pease, the vice-president of the Brewers Association, told me. In his sixteen years at the event, he noted with some pride, no one had been killed or seriously injured. But, then, security was pervasive. Uniformed police, private security guards, and hundreds of volunteers prowled the booths, slicing the wristband off anyone who had overindulged. At one point, late in the evening, after I’d stumbled over a power line (or something), I went up to get a free sample. A guard hustled over to the server and muttered, “Go easy on the pour.”





Calagione, for his part, had no time to drink. Going to the Great American Beer Festival with him, a friend of his had told me, is like attending a Star Trek convention with Captain Kirk. Wherever he went, beer geeks and fellow-brewers clustered around, taking pictures, handing him books to sign, or taping his greetings on a handheld recorder. The Dogfish booth was mobbed. While most others had five or ten people in front of them, Calagione’s crowd spilled across the concrete till it engulfed the Blue Moon booth across the way. I helped him work the taps for the first half hour, then slipped off with samples of Theobroma and Sahtea.

Like many craft-beer drinkers, I’d started out liking Pilsners and pale ales, and found myself craving more and more hops. The Theobroma managed to satisfy that taste indirectly. It was a lovely amber-colored beer with a hint of bitter chocolate at the beginning and an afterburn of chilies. But despite its ten per cent alcohol, it seemed almost too fainthearted. It was the Sahtea that I loved. For all Selders’s concern, the tea and spices in it hovered politely in the background, leaving the yeast to run the show. Cloudy and golden, with a lush flowering of bananas and cloves, it tasted like something a trader might have sipped a century ago, standing in a colonial market in Ceylon, with open baskets of tea and spices all around. It wasn’t an extreme beer by any stretch, and it certainly didn’t taste Finnish. But it was a time capsule nonetheless.

When the session was over and the booth was packed up, when six thousand drunken revellers had descended on the streets of Denver, and the other Dogfish brewers had followed in search of more beer, Calagione and I walked back to our hotel. “Remember what Patrick was saying that day in his office, about how alcohol affects the brain?” he said. I nodded. McGovern had shown us a paper illustrated with scans of animals’ brains. Alcohol’s emotional effect is unusually complex, he had said. It starts out as a stimulant and only later, when you’ve had a lot, becomes a depressant. Calagione laughed. “Does it work that way for you?” he said. “Because it doesn’t for me. I never get around to the depressant part.” ♦

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An audio interview with Burkhard Bilger.

PROFILES

THE HUNGRY TRAVELLERS

Exploring the world through its food.

BY JANE KRAMER

CICI OLSSON/COURTESY ARTISAN BOOKS

In the fall of 1985, a few months after China opened the Tibetan border, Jeffrey Alford, from Laramie, met Naomi Duguid, from Toronto, on the roof of a hotel dormitory for foreigners in Lhasa. It was ten at night, and since there were no lights on the roof to see by they sat in the dark, listening to the sound of chimes and chanting, and began to talk—which turns out to have been the best way to get acquainted. They had this in common: they were restless; they were at home in strange and forbidding places; they were attached to the early albums of Herbie Hancock; and they liked to eat. But it was hard to imagine them getting acquainted in what you would call the real world—let alone getting married, writing cookbooks, and ending up members in high standing of a small, scholarly circle of food writers whose work leaves the rest of the food world far behind, collecting recipes.

Duguid, known to her friends as Nom, was a tall, streaky-blond, hazel-eyed lawyer of thirty-five, with a house and a boyfriend at home, and she was travelling through Asia on a five-month work sabbatical, hoping to resolve the question of why the offer of a partnership in the Toronto firm where she had labored happily for nearly five years had made her want to flee. Alford was thirty-one, a tall, skinny, ponytailed seeker of truth with a master's degree in creative writing, a passion for the East, a light heroin habit, and a reputation for supporting his wanderlust with tag sales in his parents' front yard—his father was a vice-president of the University of Wyoming—and with odd jobs as a gold and cash courier on the South Asia smuggling circuit. At the time, he and five recruits were getting ready to cross the Himalayas, from Lhasa to Kathmandu, on mountain bikes, for a magazine called *Bicycle Rider*, which was planning to run a piece by Alford about cycling in Tibet. Duguid was travelling with the eighty-two-year-old Swiss writer Ella Maillart, a legendary adventurer whose letters Nehru once claimed had saved his sanity in prison, and whom Duguid had met for the first time that September in another foreigners' dorm, in Kunming. "Nom always meets everybody," Alford says. "Even me."

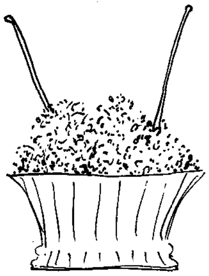
The logistics of love are daunting at twelve thousand feet—Alford describes their attempt at a kiss as "two sheets of sandpaper scraping"—but not, as it were, insurmountable. Ten days later, Duguid wrote a letter of resignation to her law firm—"Dear guys, It's not the altitude, but I'm not coming back"—placed an awkward call to her boyfriend, and set out to explore Nepal with a couple of anthropologists she had just met, while Alford finished his assignment. She wasn't worried about their future, because they had already covered all the big, important "life things." Did they want a family? Could they have one and keep travelling? How would they pay for "a life open to the world"? By November, they had made their way south to Thailand and were camped on an island beach, where Alford started to withdraw. ("I had scored this big hit in Hong Kong. I gave it away. But I had thought, How do I explain this part of my life to Nom? She was great.") It took four days, and they got through them talking about all the places that were left to see, and how to get there.

A month later, they flew home. Alford met Duguid's friends, including her old law-firm colleagues at Sack Charney Goldblatt Mitchell, whose view of her defection, as she describes it, ran from disbelief to "We're sorry for us but exhilarated for you." Duguid met Alford's friends and got to know his family. Her

Left: Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid with their sons in Laos. Above: one of their stir-

own family—her father, a navigational engineer; her mother, a physiotherapist for disabled children; and her only brother—had died by the time she was twenty-seven, and she told the Alfords that until Jeff "so much loss" had kept her running from anything like a settled life. A few months later, they were married and back in Asia, crossing the Pamir and Karakoram mountains—from Kashgar, in the Turkik province of Xinjiang, to Gilgit, in Pakistan—on a pair of red mountain bikes.

They began writing together about biking together, perhaps because in those days Duguid was better on a bike than in the kitchen, where long workdays had left her pretty much limited to baking bread—something her mother had taught her—and boiling pasta. But Alford, by his account, was already obsessed with food. He had cooked his way through his mother's "Joy of Cooking" by the age of twenty, worked as "the sauté guy" at a fancy Laramie restaurant as a University of Wyoming undergraduate, and learned the rudiments of Thai cooking from a student from Bangkok who worked there with him. He was also passionate about baking. When he wrote his master's thesis—his adviser, the novelist John Edgar Wideman, had told him, "Write me a story about the things you know"—he called it "Bread, Travel, and Drugs," which just about covered nine months he had just spent in a cottage-cum-student crash pad on the Dingle Peninsula, hiking, smoking pot, and perfecting his landlady's recipe for Irish soda bread. "I love utilitarian things," he says. "I loved being in that kitchen, I loved the smell of the bread and the steamy windows and my sour-green-apple jam sitting on the sill." After a month in the Pamirs—in the course of which he tasted "some amazing flat-breads," and confessed to Duguid that he wanted to write a flatbread book—he started looking through food magazines and said to her, "Wait a minute, I can do this. I know more about food than anything." Their first food article, "Delicious Asian Flatbreads," appeared in *Bon Appétit* in 1988. (They got a thousand dollars for it, or about what Duguid would have been bringing in for a day's work as a partner at Sack Charney.) A year later, they published a piece on Thai drinking food—the tapas of Southeast Asia—in *Food & Wine*, which discreetly called it "Be Cool . . . with Spicy Thai Salads." "We write to travel" is how Duguid describes their life since then. "It was never the other way around."



By now, Alford and Duguid have raised two sons and written six books. And while their books are undeniably cookbooks (two James Beard Cookbook of the Year awards, for a start), they are also cultural encounters—travel journals, stories, history lessons, and photographic essays that, taken together, explore the imagination and the exigencies that produce a cuisine and, in many ways, define the people who create it. The couple have been called culinary anthropologists, but culinary geographers is at least as accurate. They prefer "friendly amateurs." Ann Bramson, their editor and publisher at Artisan, in New York—who inherited their first manuscript in the mid-nineties, languishing neglected at another press, and has been shepherding their books since then—says that she recognized them right away as "prodigious readers and unaccredited scholars," and was determined to do justice to them with books that were serious enough to accommodate their field photographs and uncommon texts and at the same time striking enough to make you stop, look, read, and reflect on your way to a recipe that you might otherwise never think of trying. (Duguid, an accomplished photographer, "does people," and Alford, who has turned himself into one, does the mise en scène, a job he more or less described this way: "I'm not a ruin kind of guy, but there were these ruins, so I took the picture.") A few critics have found them too striking or, as Mark Bittman in the *Times* once put it, would have preferred more recipes. James Oseland, the editor of *Saveur*, disagrees. "People pick up a book of Nom and Jeff's, and they know that it's something else, something more than a cookbook," he told me, after a lecture they gave in May, at the Asia Society in New York. "It's their overriding sense of humanity that sets them apart from the flock. They're taking the exotic out of the everyday in *every* sense, not simply the recipe sense. They're telling you, 'It's just the world. The world won't hurt you. Don't be scared.'"

That world has nothing to do with states and borders. They write about foods, like grains or rice, that nearly everyone cultivates and, in one form or another, eats—their first book, "Flatbreads & Flavors: A Baker's Atlas," took them to four continents in six years—and, most often, about the kind of cooking that defines what they call the "real regions," which are ethnic or even tribal and topographical and ignore the boundaries of nation-states to form culinary countries of their own. "Hot Sour Salty Sweet," their third book, was about the food cooked by the peoples of the Mekong valley, and, for it, they followed the river from near its source, high on the Tibetan plateau, through China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, and down to the delta in Vietnam where it meets the South China Sea. "Beyond the Great Wall," which came out this year, was a culinary tour through the hinterland cultures of "the other China"—cultures beyond the pale of the country's insistent Han identity—and took the Alford-Duguids from Tibet to the Xinjiang-Kazakh border, and from the grasslands of Inner Mongolia to the rice terraces of southern Yunnan. Alford calls it a book about survival.

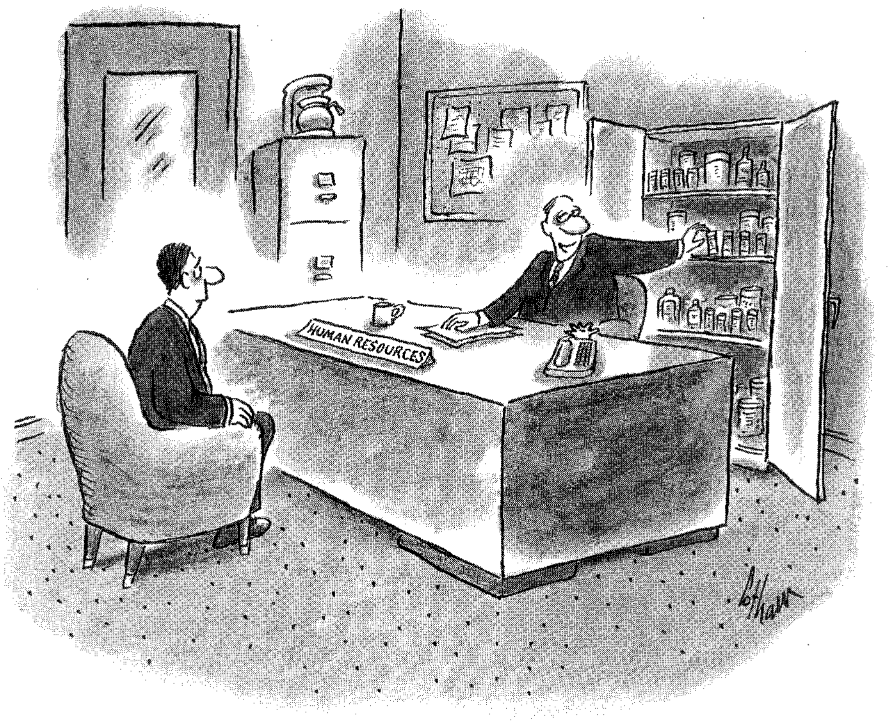
They travel light, on anything headed in the right direction—a riverboat, a mountain bus, a truck that stops for them on an empty road, a train with a thousand people hanging out the windows. When nothing shows up, they hitchhike or rent a bike or walk. Duguid, who on one trip to China rode from a Dong village in Guizhou to a bus stop near the Guanghi border "strapped onto the back of someone's motorcycle with my backpack, my camera pack, my tripod, and three Guizhou stools," calls this "staying vulnerable" to the people, the place, and the possibility of a new taste wherever they get dropped off. "They still travel the way I did when I was twenty and backpacking through Europe, going where the wind blew me," Tina Ujlaki, the food editor at *Food & Wine*, says. "They talk about arriving in a place and having no idea of what they'll find there. The awe that comes with that—it's always present."

Alford once told me that his father's idea of travel was to cajole one of his three boys into the family Rambler—Jeff was the most willing—and drive to Colorado to play the dog races. "We'd sleep in the car and in the morning head for the truck stop with the best cinnamon rolls," he said, sending me back to Alford and Duguid's fourth cookbook—"Home Baking: The Artful Mix of Flour and Tradition Around the World"—for the recipe: yeast, water, oil, salt, brown sugar, cinnamon, and thirteen cups of flour make a dozen rolls, and you won't need anything else on the ride home. The first real travelling that Alford did was a bicycle trip through Wales, the summer after his freshman year in college, and he describes it this way: "I was sooooo lonesome. I missed my parents. I wanted to go home."

Duguid, however, had been travelling since childhood—first with her family, and then, as a student after her father died, on a legacy from a great-aunt who "saw to it that I didn't owe." By the time she finished college—she read geography at Queens University in Ontario, with a year abroad at the London School of Economics—she had already seen "some nice bits" of Africa. By the end of law school, she knew India and Nepal. Two years after getting her degree, she was back in India. She calls that trip an experiment in "living undefended, unintroduced, and depending on serendipity." She was also, by all accounts, a brilliant lawyer. She had what her college roommate and University of Toronto law-school classmate Trisha Jackson calls "that special combination of intellect and intuition and engagement." But she had no interest in a white-shoe practice. At law school, she had volunteered to work with immigrants at a legal-aid clinic. As a lawyer, she specialized in labor arbitration, "always for the labor side." She was a radical in a suit. She loved immigrant Toronto, and rented an apartment in a house on Henry Street, just around the corner from the ethnic olio of food stores known in the city as Kensington Market. (The year before she left for Tibet, she bought a house of her own on the same block.) She wanted to know where everybody came from, what their families did, and what their lives had been like in, say, India or China. And whenever she could she went back to Asia.

Alford began what he calls his "Asia adventures" in 1977. He says that, unlike Duguid, who is instantly at ease with strangers, he was "too shy" for conversation, and would simply dig in wherever he landed for a couple of months, not saying much, until people got used to him. He was able to live in Asia on very little money, and when he ran out he usually found a way to make more. (His brother Jim, who is an artist in Santa Fe, told me, "He left on that first trip with twelve hundred dollars, and he came home, two years later, with twelve hundred dollars, and I didn't ask.") He bought clove oil in Sri Lanka and sold it to Ayurvedics in India, and then he bought Indian saris to sell in Sri Lanka. He bought jewelry in Thailand and Nepal, hawked it at his Laramie yard sales, and paid for his next plane ticket with the profits. His days as a smugglers' courier began in 1981, and they took him from Hong Kong to Kathmandu (where the airport metal detectors were always broken) with, as he usually describes it, "five pounds of gold up my bum." He made eight hundred dollars for every flight, with two hundred more thrown in for the flight back, which involved the arguably easier job of carrying twenty thousand dollars in a money belt. He could live for a year on a thousand dollars. That was his life until he decided to write a story about bicycling across the Himalayas and met Duguid on a roof in Lhasa. "Here was my vagabond brother, moving into her life," Jim Alford told me. "It took a lot of courage, maybe even more for him than for her."

One of the things that Alford and Duguid decided, early on in Lhasa, was that any children they had should travel with them—which means that for the better part of fifteen years they packed up their boys in November, along with the books and the homework, the Beanie Babies and the Lego, and deposited them back in their classrooms at the end of January. Dominic—a senior at the University of Toronto now—rode from Cholon to Saigon on the back of a motorcycle at the age of two; Tashi, a Toronto freshman, started walking, at one, in Tafraout. Neither seems to have suffered from his peripatetic life or, in fact, to have found it at all unusual. (It lasted until Dom's eleventh-grade French teacher started giving him zeros, for incomplete assignments.) Sometimes they missed the sandwiches—bread by Duguid—in their school lunchboxes, or, at least, preferred them to some of the food they tasted travelling; Tash hates onions, garlic, scallions, chives, and "every other oniony thing," and Dom's view of seafood is "I have trouble being at the same table with a fish." But Tash talks casually about the day he ran off a path in Laos—he was eight then—hoping to climb the biggest funeral jar in the Plain of Jars, and had to be rescued from a minefield. And Dom includes, in his



"Don't worry—we'll medicate you through the probationary period."

"I'll have whatever is hot, fast, and artisanal."

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list of "fun times," the night a plane taking the family from Rangoon to Mandalay made a mysterious stop and left them stranded on a darkened airstrip outside Taunggyi, the capital of Burma's dissident Shan State; they ended up in a hotel room with one bed and a television set and got to watch the playoffs between the Denver Broncos and the Pittsburgh Steelers. (He was eleven when that happened.) Between them, the boys can name twenty-five or thirty countries where they have travelled. When I asked Dom if they were ever scared, he said, "Why? Nom and Jeff were with us."

Tash describes his parents' way of working abroad like this: "When we travelled, I was always very confused. We'd eat somewhere, leave, go back to the same place, eat more. I'd say, 'Guys, call back! Get the recipe!' But they didn't need to. They 'see' recipes." Alford and Duguid's methods are, by their own admission, odd. "We don't 'do' interviews," Duguid says. "We don't take notes unless we're asked to. We engage. We appreciate. We're there to learn." (They don't use translators, either; they figure that by now, between them, they can get by in about a dozen languages.) Even the diaries they keep, at night on the road, are sketchy. Mainly, they depend on the photographs they take—at last count, an archive of more than a hundred thousand color slides—as aide-mémoire and on the kind of confidence that comes from months spent watching and tasting and listening, or, as Alford calls it, "hanging out."

They also rely on Duguid's prodigious memory. She remembers everything—from the date she sailed to Europe with her parents on the Empress of England (May 12, 1961) to the minutiae of cases she argued twenty-five years ago to the names and smells and colors and textures of foods she sampled months before in a Tajik yurt near the Khunjerab Pass or at a stand in a market in northern Laos, and the order in which different cooks put those foods in the pot, and even the shape of the pot. Alford, for his part, absorbs what could be called the praxis of a particular place: the way a fire is tended in Tibet, where even a cup of tea can take an hour to heat; the way the spices are ground and roasted separately for a coconut-chicken curry in Kandy; the way a mound of sticky dough turns into a five-foot strand of "flung noodles" when a burly Uighur grabs each end and, with a flick of his wrists, sends it looping through the air—a process that he and Duguid describe in "Beyond the Great Wall" and admit to never having mastered.

Sometimes they miss something or remember wrong. (The "spicy chickpea fritters," from their fifth book, "Mangoes & Curry Leaves: Culinary Travels through the Great Subcontinent," will fall apart unless you think to beat a couple of eggs and add them.) Sometimes their recipes are more interesting than appealing; it is hard to imagine working up an appetite for Tibetan bone broth, even if you take their advice and substitute oxtails or beef shanks for the yak. But most of the time they send you straight to the kitchen. I've cooked from their books since "Hot Sour Salty Sweet" came out, eight years ago, and I made an instantly addictive Thai soup—the one with, among other good things, wild lime leaves, bird chilies, oyster mushrooms, lemongrass, and a lot of fresh shrimp. James Oseland, from *Saveur*, told me, "The difference between Nom and Jeff is precisely what makes them complementary as observers. Nom is the person reaching out, leaning over, looking into the pot of that soup lady in Thailand and finding out how many kids she has, and Jeff is the one who is there, quiet, filing away the information in his head, processing it, and someday they will use it together."

Duguid and Alford live with their sons in the house on Henry Street that Duguid bought the year before she went to Tibet—a brick Victorian row house with a garden in back and a small carriage house off the alley behind it. They have not changed much in twenty-three years, though Duguid's idea of a great suit now is apt to involve an antique Akha tribal jacket, from a Laotian flea market, and a pair of jeans, and Alford's ponytail has long been replaced by short, if unruly, gray hair, trimmed at home by a hairdresser he met in the park one day; she told him that he "needed work." But the house has changed. It is stuffed with memories of travel, in the form of fabrics, hangings, bowls, pots, posters, jewelry, and a lot of unidentifiable objects that Duguid refers to generically as "rescued stuff." It is also where they write their books, reconstruct the flavors they carry home in their heads from halfway around the world, and consult a food and travel library that over the years has spilled out of the big study they share on the second floor up to the door of the master bedroom, on the third, and down to the workshop in the basement where Alford listens to world music, restores whatever "useful" (or possible) furniture he finds, discarded, on Toronto's sidewalks—the family eats at a big open maple counter that was once a length of floorboards in the local Chinese Methodist church—and mends old bicycles, including the two red mountain bikes that saw them safely from Kashgar to Gilgit in 1986.

When the Alford-Duguids work on a book at home, they divide the recipes between them, cook something, and then see if the other eats it, or thinks it's "right." Duguid describes the testing they do as a kind of translation, because they cook in a simple, hand-me-down Western kitchen, with ingredients that any of their neighbors would be able to find, albeit with some effort, in an Asian market. She says that they test "by taste," though this is a term that for her can include the smells from the brazier in a tribal kitchen and even the stories the women cooking in it tell. They are less interested in accuracy than in authenticity. (The exception, of course, is baking.) Call it the evocation of a world on a plate. I spent a couple of weeks with them in Toronto, late last May, and on my first day in their kitchen Duguid told me to stop worrying about what their recipes said, because "our whole point is that you're not a cookbook, you're in your own kitchen with your own pots and pans: relax, go to the market, think 'yummy,' and use what's there." She and Alford are splendid cooks—which doesn't always follow from being splendid cookbook writers—but if dinner on Henry Street is "less good" sometimes, she says, "it's not the end of everything."

Alford likes his recipes simple. "Pure" and "cheap" is the way he describes his style. Their friend Ethan Poskanzer, who claims the distinction of knowing the Alford-Duguids before they knew each other—he crashed (and cooked) with Alford in Ireland as a student, and a few years later turned up at law school in Toronto with Duguid and then at the same law firm—told me that "if there are only three ingredients in one of Jeff and Nom's recipes I know the influence is his." Today, I read their cookbooks with this in mind. The Hani pork jerky in "Beyond the Great Wall," which came from a sidewalk vender in Jiangcheng, near the Laos border, is unmistakably Alford's—pork butt, coarse salt, black pepper—and so is the story of how he came to eat it: "I was feeling a little let down by Jiangcheng the next morning as I waited for the bus. Then I spotted a Hani woman with a woven basket sitting on the sidewalk . . . everything got better from there on." Duguid, on the other hand, likes her food "*bountifully* simple," to which she often adds "soft," and "maybe a little sweet." Her stir-fry with pork and chives, on the facing page, starts with red chilies, minced garlic, and thin slices of cornstarch-coated pork loin, each seared in a little peanut oil and then combined and enriched with a new taste or texture every minute or two: salt and chives, then broth, then soy sauce, and, at the end, a sprinkling of fresh coriander. In the book, she describes the effect this way: "This pork stir-fry from Yunnan uses chives for flavor and color. The strands of green are very pretty among the strips of pork. You can substitute garlic shoots if you wish, or else scallions, cut into ribbons."

A few days before I left Toronto, Alford and Duguid decided to have a dinner party—meaning that whenever a friend called that morning Duguid, who is irrepressibly hospitable, said "Come." At noon, with the guest list at ten and growing, she told me, "Well, do we want to muddle along today, stretch some Kazakh noodles, or seize the day with marketing," and the three of us headed to Kensington Market to shop. Alford markets the way he cooks: he buys just what he needs and nothing more, and if something is missing he makes do. But Duguid markets the way *she* cooks; whatever she sees that pleases her goes into her shopping bag. (Alford, who had been thinking of a "simple feast," maybe some noodle soup and grilled boar, quickly headed off to a music store, saying he couldn't bear to watch.) We came home with rhubarb, ginger, and asparagus from a Tamil organic grocer called Potz; coconut milk, pickled mustard greens, and chili-bean paste from the Hua Sheng Chinese Supermarket; rice flour and mung dal from the Indians at House of Spice; pressed tofu from the Vietnamese "tofu lady" at Fong On; and limes and celery root from the Portuguese greengrocer. Duguid used it all.

The asparagus and the limes ended up in a Thai chicken and vegetable salad. The rhubarb topped an "any-day skillet cake," from "Home Baking." ("I do my grandmother's thing," she said, plunging the stalks into hot and then cold water three times. "Rhubarb leaves fuzzies in your mouth usually, but not this way.") She minced the ginger with garlic, shook them into some hot peanut oil in her favorite wok, stirred for a minute, added the chili-bean paste, stirred some more, added the celery root, peeled and sliced, and a little soy sauce, tasted it, sprinkled salt, stirred again, and simmered it all in boiling water. Meanwhile, she had started the dal—a Henry Street staple—sniffed it, thought for a bit, and tossed in a handful of the mustard greens. While the dal cooked, we dry-roasted some Ethiopian coffee beans, wolfed down a lunch of pickled-vegetable and pork-paté sandwiches from the local Vietnamese takeout, and tried the tofu. The phone rang, and, with the receiver scrunched to her ear, she talked a Washington food reporter through a recipe for Tibetan stew while measuring the water for a pot of Asian rice (place the tip of your index finger on the rice; stop pouring when you get to the first knuckle). Forty minutes into these whirlwind preparations, she instructed me on the essentials of a Thai beef salad, somewhat embellished since it first appeared, ten years ago, in "Seductions of Rice," their second book, but still the recipe everyone mentions as the one they can almost taste, just by reading the ingredients: rare sliced sirloin, lettuce, cabbage, shallots, cucumber, dandelion vinegar, fresh coriander, pepper, minced hot chili, lime juice, and "whatever else looks good," as long as it's laced with Thai fish sauce, preferably the kind with the picture of a squid on the bottle. When she finished the list, she laughed and said, "How good is that!"

Alford, meanwhile, had been rolling cracker dough with a French pin—a long, narrow, walnut cylinder that he had dug out of a drawer full of flatbread stamps and rolling pins, many of them tin chapati pins that they bought in India in 2004, researching "Mangoes & Curry Leaves." Alford controls the production of all things dry, flat, and salty on Henry Street (and Duguid the production of loaf breads and most of the cakes), and he is passionate and precise about his crackers (a teaspoon of salt and a cup of "warmish" water to every two cups of organic whole-wheat flour in the food processor). He rolls his dough to the kind of paper thinness that bakes in a minute or two and breaks into hot, crisp chips. "Push from the body, not the arms," he kept telling me, when I tried the pin. He sprinkled the first few batches of dough with Parmesan, stopped for a short argument with Duguid, who loathes Parmesan crackers—"The cheese burns and everything turns bitter and it's like the terrible crunch of burnt toast in your mouth," she says—and put the cheese down after she started tossing coriander leaves into a pot of pristine chicken soup (chicken and water) that he had simmering on the stove. Dom, who was home by then, told me that his parents rarely fought, but that they did have "some intense discussions" about food.

Alford had promised me a lesson in making the Kazakh soup noodles from "Beyond the Great Wall"—flour, salt, and water, stretched by thumb and, in his kitchen, dried on a rack that had started life as a neighbor's deck chair—so we slapped together some batter, with the help of a friend who had come early for a lesson, too, and been waylaid slicing celery root. When the rack was full, we switched to hand-rolled Guizhou rice noodles, which you shape into balls between the palms of your hands and then flatten into pointy ovals by rubbing the palms together. (It's harder than it sounds.) They felt gummy, so we dropped a few into Alford's broth. Duguid tried one, pronounced it "tough"—it was—checked the label on the sack she had just bought, and said, "Aha, a rice-flour issue! This comes from India. It should have been Chinese flour. Much finer."

By then, the house was full of people. (The youngest was two.) They sniffed the pots, said "ummm" or "cool"—the one prerequisite for food and friendship at the Alford-Duguids is a healthy contempt for the rhetoric of culinary appreciation—poured some wine from an assortment of bottles and Tetra Pak cartons, and settled down on the garden steps to watch Alford feed charcoal into an old Weber for a roast of rubbed wild boar. (His rub is Thai fish sauce and a lot of pepper: "accessible home cooking," as he describes it.) Dina Fayerman, a high-school English teacher and cookbook collector who met the couple at a concert of "two-headed Ethiopian lutes" in 1992 and quickly became their bottom-line taster and grammarian, sat down next to me, and we began to talk. A few days earlier, I had asked Fayerman to describe them, from her point of view as a Jewish intellectual who could tell a Montreal bagel from a Toronto bagel in a blind tasting. "They have that Wasp virtue of not being sheeted and compressed, that pioneer thing that drives people to repudiate expectations," she told me. "I've watched them making sausage. They have no casing. Nom cuts the ends off a big plastic tonic bottle, pushes the meat in one end and out the other, and it's a sausage. Jeff does the same thing with one clean sock, and saves the mate. They mesh with each other because they're so completely different."

We served ourselves at the kitchen counter and ate in the garden. Nobody talked about food then. A television producer named Anne Mackenzie told me a funny story about trying to talk the CBC into a cooking show with the Alford-Duguids called "Eyes Wide Open." ("Forget the movie," she said. "It's the way they travel around the world. And, besides, it sounded cheaper to do than Nom's title, 'A Travellers' Kitchen.' ") Dom, who is thinking about a doctorate in analytic philosophy, showed me his reading list. Tash emerged from a laptop session on the living-room couch to announce that reticulated pythons were thirty-seven feet long. Duguid, who just that week had spotted the first lilies of the valley of the season coming up nicely a few feet from the front steps, wondered aloud if her delphiniums were doing as well at the family's farm—ninety acres of fields and woods outside the town of Durham, a couple of hours northwest of Toronto, where the Alford-Duguids spend their summers and weekends. She was worried about skunks digging up her beds for grubs. Alford was worried about groundhogs—"my Moby-Dick"—digging up his fields. It was a warm night. We looked at the stars and ate. Everything was delicious. Toward ten, Fayerman held up her empty plate, shook her head, and said, "What do I need to cook for when I've got Nom and Jeff living down the street?"

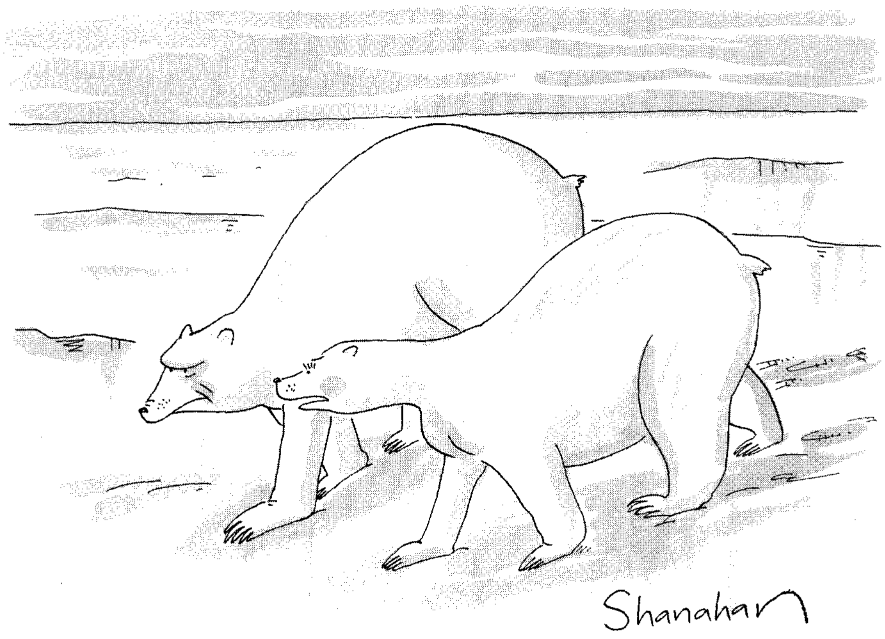
Duguid likes cooking with friends around. She likes the conversation, the gossip, the chance to hear a good story. She takes her time, and she isn't bothered when dishes pile up in the sink. She says, "Friends in the kitchen? What could be more communal than that?" Alford likes cooking alone—the concentration, the economy of thought and gesture. "Nom will take an interest in what I'm cooking—she's more experimental, she has such an active head," he says. "But I have zero desire to hear her suggestions for change." He washes the pots and the plates he uses as he goes along and "all the surfaces, then the fridge." By dinnertime, the floor is mopped and the kitchen is clean. "For me, it's a kind of meditation," he told me. "Like building our barn at the farm, or making a stone wall, or quilting. It's all the same." (Alford learned quilting from his mother; he makes quilts, mends quilts, and will happily spend "more money than I ever spend on anything" if he comes across a nineteenth-century double pink at a flea market.) Duguid likes the buzz of Toronto life—dim sum with friends, a morning at the museum, her weekly belly-dance classes, the pleasure of being anonymous in a big city. Alford, whose concession to city life mainly involves a morning trip to the corner Starbucks for a cup of coffee, prefers the farm—a day on his John Deere tractor, or out in the woods, hacking paths, while Duguid gardens or drives to the shape-note group she sings with.

Duguid likes the party they throw in Toronto in December, the night before New Year's Eve, with the house so crowded and toasty and the kitchen so full of good smells. Alford prefers the party they throw at the farm in July, although he complains afterward about the lawyers who drive up from the city in "a stream of BMWs." He says that the lawyers intimidate him. (Duguid tells him, "Phooey, it's you who intimidate them. Get over it. Preserve the harmony.") The party at the farm lasts all weekend. Alford keeps a wood fire going in the grilling pit that he put together with rocks from the farm and rebar grating from a local hardware store. People pitch tents, and if it's chilly at night they grab some padding from a pile of down jackets that he and Duguid buy by the armful at a Toronto resale establishment called the Pound, where two dollars buys a pound of clothes. They hold figure-eight bicycle races. They dance to a d.j.'s track and to Alford's remix disks in the big barn that the family has been rebuilding since 2000—the year after they bought the farm and started stripping the farmhouse—with the help of a local writer, barn scholar, and shiitake farmer by the name of Jon Radojkovic. Radojkovic, who has since become Alford's closest friend, told me that there were "two Jeffs": the Jeff from Toronto, who doesn't answer the phone, and the Jeff from Durham, who farms all day and talks by the fire all night.

Last summer, Alford and Duguid decided that the time had come to take on separate projects. They were at an impasse on the research for a new book, about Celtic cooking. Duguid had flown to Galicia and Asturias in November, to see what remained of traditional Celtic food in fusion Spain, and hadn't found much besides spelt bread. Alford had flown to Wales, and found some, but most of the people cooking it were rich Londoners in weekend cottages. ("The best thing I learned in Wales was when I passed this guy, way out on the Lleyn Peninsula, who was building stone walls," he says. "I pulled over. He taught me so much about walls!") In the end, they were relieved to stop. Duguid, who has always thought of herself as "a photographer first and a food writer second," wanted to put together a book of her own—a book of photographs, and maybe an exhibit to go with it—about "how humankind has fed itself, but without being geeky." The title she had in mind was "Food Everywhere" ("from planting and threshing to herding and marketing and cooking," she said), and she had already started taking pictures for it, on a trip to Ethiopia last spring. "There was an aroma of butter and wood smoke in the air—I thought of Tibet," she told me. "And the people? They were ecstatic, they were kissing their churches, they were *melding* with the walls!"

Alford, for his part, was thinking about some time on his own in Thailand. He had fallen in love with Thailand in the seventies, on his first trip—with the food, the language, the music, the dancing that starts in the bars at midnight and goes on till five in the morning—and since then had managed to get back nearly every year. Three years ago, he and Duguid bought an apartment on the "liveliest, tastiest street" in Chiang Mai, sixty miles from the Burma border; he calls Chiang Mai "the city where I belong." ("People are so much their jobs in Toronto," he told me, "but in Chiang Mai I'm the one with more of a job than anybody.") Last fall, writing there every day, he finished his first novel—a "love story" about four young junkies hanging on to each other and to their tattered lives in a Kathmandu flophouse called the Bluebird Lodge. He wanted to go back and begin a new one: "I'm thinking, it's about northern Thailand, a year in the same place, some food in it, with me as the fly on the wall."

There was nothing to stop them. The boys were in college, the world would survive for a while longer without Celtic recipes, and, as Duguid said, they never compete for space; they cede it. Alford put it this way: "We're massive talkers, we negotiate." But a few months later, to no one's surprise but theirs, they set those plans aside and called Ann Bramson about a new cookbook they were going to write together. "It was a Saturday, but we were so excited, we called her cell phone and caught her in the middle of brunch with friends," Duguid wrote to me that week. The book was going to be "Burma-focussed," because Burma, with its variety of tribal peoples, "closes the loop of food cultures" between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, and because "the situation in Burma makes it all the more obvious and necessary to go"—and, of course, because the food there is spectacularly interesting. They were going to base themselves in Chiang Mai. Alford could start his new novel, and, since they would both be there, why not hold a series of Chiang Mai cooking classes, featuring their local street venders? Alford, in his own letter, called it "a chance to do something, workwise, to help make money for people we know who are struggling to survive." They plan to leave this winter, right after their Toronto party. As Duguid says, "How good is that!" ♦



"That is so angry white male!"

FICTION

GHOSTS

BY EDWIDGE DANTICAT

Pascal Dorien was living in Bel Air—the Baghdad of Haiti, some people called it, but that would be Cité Pendue, an even more destitute and brutal neighborhood, where hundreds of middle-school children entering a national art contest drew M-16s and beheaded corpses, and wrote such things as "It's not polite to shoot at funeral processions" and "I'm happy to have turned in my weapons. What about you?" Bel Air was actually a mid-level slum. It had a few Protestant and Catholic churches, vodou temples, restaurants, bakeries, and dry cleaners, even Internet cafés. For a while, there were no gang wars; there was just one gang, whose headquarters were in a large empty warehouse, painted with murals of serpents, lions, and goats, and Haile Selassie and Bob Marley. The two dozen or so young male inhabitants of the warehouse called it Baz Benin, for reasons that only the person who came up with the tag knew for sure. That person, Piye, was killed when a special-forces team shot several bullets into the back of his head as he was lying in bed one night. The shooting was in retaliation for a series of fatal kidnappings, some of which the Baz Benin men had committed and some of which they had not. (The men of Baz Benin gave themselves the monikers of Nubian royalty, which also happened to suggest, in Creole, menacing acts—*piye*, for example, means "to pillage.")

Pascal's parents were shop owners and restaurateurs in Bel Air. They had a slightly larger yard than most of their crammed-in neighbors, so they had closed it off with sheets of rusty corrugated metal, and there, at four long wooden tables beneath a string of light bulbs which dangled from a second-story clostra-block window, they served up to thirty customers per night, if the turnover was fast. They sold rice and beans, of course, and fried plantains and cornmeal, but their specialty, for a long time, was fried pigeon meat.

Pascal's parents had moved to Bel Air at a time when the neighborhood was inhabited mostly by peasants, living there temporarily so that their children could finish primary school. But as the trees in the provinces vanished into charcoal and the mountains gave way, washing the country's topsoil into the sea, they, like the

PEP BONET/NOOR; ALEX WEBB/MAGNUM PHOTOS

others, stayed and raised their two sons and at least a thousand pigeons, which, over the years, they sold both alive and dead.

Pascal's father had been a pigeon breeder since he was a boy in Léogâne. He'd stopped briefly in the early eighties, when some soldiers came and collected his birds because it was rumored that he was breeding carriers to send messages to armed invaders in the Dominican Republic. But when the dictatorship finally collapsed—without any help from his pigeons—he started again. Then most of his customers were nervous young men who wanted to perform a ritual before their first sexual encounter: they'd slit the pigeon's throat and let it bleed into a mixture of Carnation condensed milk and a carbonated malt beverage called Malta. Sometimes their fathers would come with them, and, after the sons had held their noses and forced down the drink, the fathers would laugh and say, as the pigeon's headless body was still gyrating on the ground, "I pity that girl."

It was a ritual that Pascal's parents didn't approve of. But for each bird that was killed this way they were paid enough to buy two more. They quietly mourned the days when people had bought pigeons as pets for their children. Then they began missing the days of the fathers and sons, because suddenly their customers were beefy young men who had gathered themselves into what were at first called "popular organizations," then gangs. The gang members, who were also called *chimès*—chimeras, or ghosts—were, for the most part, former street children who couldn't remember ever having lived in a house, boys whose parents had died or been murdered during the dictatorship, leaving them alone in a lawless and overpopulated city. Later, these young men were joined by deportees from the United States and Canada and by some older men from the neighborhood, aspiring-rap-musician types. The older local men were "connected"—that is, ambitious businessmen and politicians used them to swell the ranks of political demonstrations, giving them guns to shoot when a crisis was needed and having them withdraw when calm was required. Sometimes, before these demonstrations, so many men came for the milk-Malta-pigeon-blood mix that Pascal's parents were tempted to close the business for good. How had they become the people in whose yard pigeons were tortured and massacred? Finally, they released their last two pigeons. For a while, the birds kept coming back to nest, then someone in the neighborhood must have got to them, and Pascal's parents never saw that last pair again.

Still, with the money they'd made from the pigeons, Pascal's parents were able to expand their menu. They bought the house next door and added a few more tables. Pascal's father bought a pickup truck, which he drove back and forth between Léogâne and Port-au-Prince daily, packed with people and livestock. He was always at the restaurant, however, for the busiest time, from 7 P.M. till midnight, when the gang members, many of whom had by this time abandoned politics for the drug trade, took over the entire establishment. Watching these boys drift from being sellers to users of what they liked to call "the white man's powder," watching them grow unrecognizable to anyone but one another, Pascal's parents were disheartened and disgusted, but they kept the restaurant open, because, as they often acknowledged, the blight that had destroyed the neighborhood that had once been a kind of haven for the poor was allowing them to prosper, to send their children to school with the heirs of the country's tiny middle class. Although they could not afford the luxurious extras—holidays at the resorts of Jacmel and Labadie, or summers abroad with émigré relatives—their children were making contacts that might one day help them get good jobs and marriages. In order for their children to leave one day without ever having to look back, the Doriens had to stay.

Jules, Pascal's older brother, had already fulfilled this promise. For a long time, he had dated a girl whose parents were in Montreal. The girl had vowed that as soon as her visa came through she would marry Jules, so that she'd be able to send for him once she got to Canada. In the meantime, the government had turned over again, and the United Nations had come to train yet another police force. Jules had joined up, even though he was scrawny—barely five feet tall—and had a disproportionately large head, a distinctive family trait that had gained him the nickname Tèt Veritab, Breadfruit Head. But Jules had found that he couldn't be a policeman and live in the room he shared with Pascal above his parents' restaurant in Bel Air. Every time a neighborhood gang member was arrested, Jules was blamed for it. So he had moved in with his girlfriend's aunt and uncle for a few months, then married and left the country. Pascal had stayed, of course, and once Jules was gone no one bothered him or his parents.

When he wasn't helping out at the restaurant or going to computer-programming classes at a vocational school, Pascal worked as a news writer for Radio Zòrèy, one of the country's most popular stations. Having grown up in Bel Air and witnessed the changes there firsthand, Pascal imagined himself becoming the kind of radio journalist who could talk about the *geto* from the inside. An idea came to him one night as he was walking from the small concrete-block kitchen his parents had built next to the street—to tempt passersby with appetizing smells—to the table where Tiye ("to kill"), a one-armed, bald-headed gang leader, was nursing a beer and a massive cigar. Tiye was wearing his plastic-and-steel artificial arm under a long-sleeved white shirt and was expertly raising and lowering his beer with the shiny metal hooks of the prosthesis. Surrounded by three eager "lieutenants," Tiye was laughing so hard about the way he'd once slapped a man, back when he'd had both his arms—sandwiching the man's head between his arms and pounding his ears—that he had to dab tears from his eyes. Pascal, eavesdropping, wished that he had a video camera, or at least a tape recorder. He wanted the rest of the country to know what made these men cry. They cannot remain *chimès* to us forever, he thought. His show at Radio Zòrèy, if he was ever given one, would be called "Ghosts." It would be controversial at first, but soon people would tune in by the thousands. A kind of sick voyeurism would keep them listening, daily, weekly, monthly, however often he was on. People would rearrange their schedules around it. They wouldn't be able to stop discussing it. "What are the people in the slums up to now?" they'd say. Then they'd be encouraged to figure out ways to alleviate the problems. Also featured on the program would be psychologists, sociologists, and urban planners.

Pascal's friend Max liked his pitch for the show. Max was a middle-class boy who lived in another type of neighborhood, one perched between affluence and despair. Max was not rich, like most of the children his mother taught at the Lycée Dumas, in the hills above Port-au-Prince, but he was also not historically poor, like Pascal; you could tell this from the small gold stud earring that he always wore in his right ear. Max had started at the station as an afternoon d.j. when Kreyòl rap—hip-hop from the slums—was just beginning to make it to the airwaves. Sometimes, Pascal would slip Max a CD from one of Baz Benin's aspiring rappers, and Max would play it on his hour-long music program.

"I'm feeling everything you're saying, but the management won't buy it," Max said. He was keeping Pascal company while Pascal translated that day's newswires into conversational Creole for the announcer to read. "Who'd sponsor a show like that?"

"The government should sponsor it," Pascal said. "I'd be offering a public service."

But, just as his friend had predicted, the station's director turned him down. A few weeks later, while Pascal was typing that afternoon's news script, he overheard the news manager, a stuttering man who had been an inept police spokesperson, discussing a program called "Homme à Homme," or "Man to Man." The program would consist of a series of in-studio conversations between gang members and business leaders. "They'll hash out their differences," he heard the news manager say, "with the help of a trained arbitrator."

The first program paired the owner of an ice factory that had been broken into at least once a week over the past six months with a gang leader from Cité Pendue who was believed to have organized the "raids."

"What do you expect?" the gang leader told the owner. "You're chilling in all this ice while we're in Hell."

The arbitrator, a Haitian-American F.B.I.-trained hostage negotiator, then suggested the obvious—that the businessman find some way to sell his ice at a lower price to the people who lived near his factory, and that the gang leader respect the property of others.

Pascal was not at the station during the taping, but he heard part of the show on the radio at home. He could not hear the whole thing because he was helping at the restaurant that night and the taunting of both guests on "Homme à Homme" by Tiye and his crew was too loud. Many of the gang members had known about Pascal's plan—he had coyly approached some of them as possible guests for his show—and, as he served them their beers, they teased him, saying, "Man, they stole your idea." A few of them tried to grab him as he put the bottles on the table—as if to squeeze out the anger that they knew was building inside him. The more they laughed, the angrier he got. They could see it in the layer of sweat that was gathering on his face. Tiye was still laughing when he said, "Pascal, bro, I didn't like the way that *masisi* said that the guys in Cité Pendue had to leave the ice alone. I should find him and kick his ass."

"That's right," one of the lieutenants chimed in.

"Pascal," someone else said. "You

should kick the ass of the guy who stole your show."

Just then Pascal's cell phone rang. It was Max.

"Man," Max said, "that guy stole your idea, and when I tried to call him on it do you know that he fired me?"

"You shouldn't have said anything," Pascal answered. "Now that you've lost your job, I'll probably lose mine, too."

Tiye and his guys were chanting, "We've got to kick his ass."

"The truth is," Pascal told Max, while passing an empty tray to his exhausted father, who was piling the last of the night's food onto a plate for himself, a cigarette dangling from his lips, "I've already put it out of my mind. 'Homme à Homme' is not the show I wanted to do. I wanted to do something closer to the skin, something more personal."

After he got off the phone, Pascal waited for Tiye and his crew to leave. His mother and the neighborhood girls she'd hired were working on the dirty dishes. He asked if he could help, but they refused. His mother's stern face, darker than the bottom of the burned pot she was scrubbing, never really changed. It was as if the heat of the kitchen had melted and sealed it. Even if she never worked again for the rest of her life, whatever beauty she'd had when she first met his father would not come back.

That night, he persuaded his mother to go to sleep a little earlier than usual, before going to bed himself. In his room, where two cots faced each other from opposite walls that he and his brother had painted bright red, he felt Jules's absence in his gut. If he were younger, he might have started crying, the way kids cry for their mothers.

Leaving had been easier for Jules than anyone had expected. Because gang members had threatened him when he was a policeman, he'd filed for political asylum in Canada as soon as his wife's papers came through. Now Jules was living in Montreal while Pascal was sleeping by himself in this ridiculously red room, his clothes hanging from nails that he and his brother had hammered into the walls. Jules called only once a week, on Sunday afternoons, though he could easily have called more often. Pascal and his parents all had cell phones now, and kept them charged and filled with usable minutes, waiting for him. Sometimes, as his mother fanned away the vapors from the food she was cooking, she'd let out a big sigh before saying, "I wonder what Jules is doing now." The truth was that Pascal was always wondering what Jules was doing. He was even thinking of asking Jules to find some way to send for him. If he were gone, he thought, his parents might finally give up the restaurant and move back to Léogâne, where they could breed pigeons again, freeing the birds in the morning and watching them return safely at dusk.

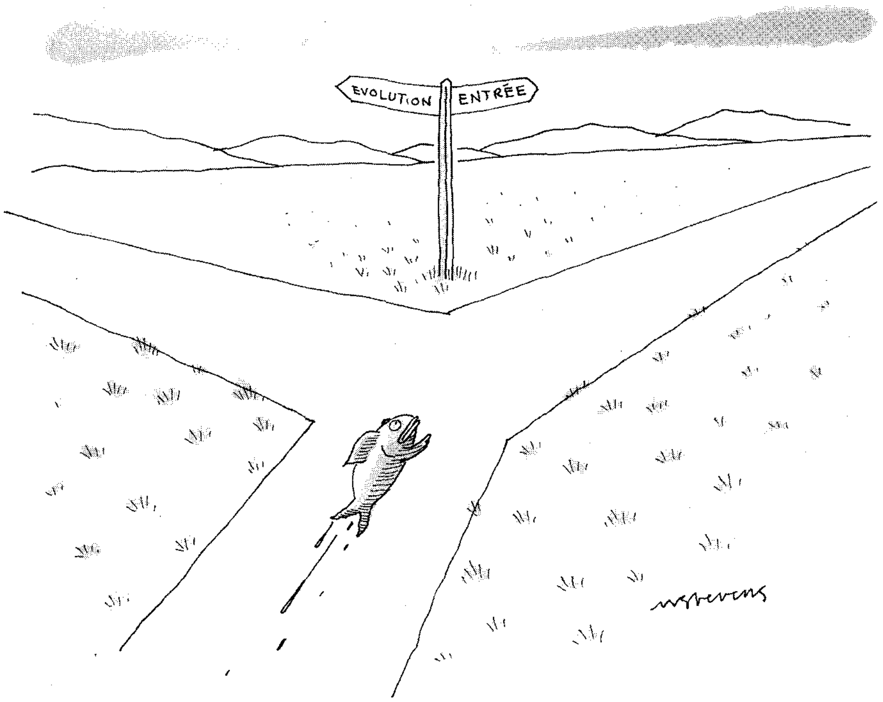
Pascal went to bed with all these thoughts swirling in his head, stirred up, he knew, by his disappointment over his show. Now it would be much harder for him to pitch the idea to another radio station. The programmers could always say, "But 'Homme à Homme' is already airing. We don't want to give these gangsters too much of a platform." He fell asleep thinking that he'd have to redefine his idea, sharpen it up a bit. Maybe he'd add music to it. Max could help with that. They could play throbbing, urgent-sounding, reggae-influenced hip-hop, and, in between songs, he would let his neighbors speak.

He was still asleep the next morning when a dozen policemen with balaclava-covered faces, members of the special forces, knocked down the front gate of his parents' house, climbed up to his room, blindfolded him, and dragged him out of bed. He was not allowed to change out of his pajamas, even as his mother wailed uncontrollably and his father shouted that a great injustice was taking place.

By the time he arrived at the nearest commissariat, a small crowd of print, TV, and radio journalists—including his boss—were waiting for him. The night before, the police spokesperson, a shrill-voiced woman, explained, there had been a shooting at Radio Zòrèy. Four men with M-16s and machine guns had been seen jumping out of the back of a tan pickup truck. They had shot at the gates and windows of the three-story building, killing the night guard. The police had arrested Tiye, the notorious head of Baz Benin, and he had named Pascal as the mastermind of the operation, the person who had sent him and his men to do the job. Pascal was not allowed to speak at the press conference. He was simply forced to stand there, like a menacing prop, surrounded by the still hooded special-forces team, with his chafed wrists handcuffed behind his back.

The box of a room where he was taken to be questioned was hot, with the stench of fresh vomit in the air. In addition to the rusty metal chair on which he was placed, with his hands still cuffed, it had a fluorescent light whose flickering beams penetrated the black cloth that covered his eyes.

During his questioning, he was repeat-



edly punched on the back of the neck.

"Do you know Tiye?" one of his interrogators asked, sucking on a cigarette and blowing the smoke in his face.

"Yes," Pascal replied, coughing. His lungs seemed to be closing down. The constriction forced pieces of last night's dinner onto the front of his pajama top and, when he was allowed to bend his neck, down to his lap.

The questions continued. "How do you know Tiye?"

"He lives in my neighborhood and often eats at my parents' restaurant," he stammered.

"You're a big man, huh? Your parents have a restaurant in the slums. I'm hungry now. Feed me. Feed me."

The officers were laughing even as he hiccupped and sobbed. To his ear, there was no difference between their laughter, their taunting, and that of Tiye and his crew. They could all have switched places, and no one would notice.

"How much did you pay the crew from Baz Benin to shoot at the station?" someone else asked.

"Nothing . . . I . . ."

"So they did it for free?"

They threw freezing water in his face. Panicked, he tried to rise from the chair, but several hands shoved him back down. Between the smoke, the vomit, and the water, he felt as though he were drowning.

After the questioning, he was left alone in a dank cell. That afternoon, his mother and father came to see him. They were allowed to kneel next to him on the floor, where he was lying in a fetal position, and remove his blindfold.

"Pascal, *chéri*." His mother wept quietly, while his father supported her with one hand beneath her armpit and the other firmly pressed against her back.

"Pascal, could you have done such a thing?" his father asked. He sounded stern, as though scolding his son.

Pascal shook his head. His throat ached, and he could taste the vomit still lingering in his mouth. His father, he knew, needed a denial from him in order to proceed with his fight.

"They're not beating me too badly," he said, to fill the silence. "Not yet, anyway. You see I have no blood on me."

The mother raised his filthy pajama top to look for cuts, wounds.

"The lawyer we got for you," his father said, "her cousin is a judge. She says she's going to try to move things along very fast."

Years earlier, under the dictatorship, Pascal's father had had a facial tic—a quick batting of his eyes and an involuntary twitching of his mouth. Now it had returned. Pascal had not seen it in such a long time that he had almost forgotten about it.

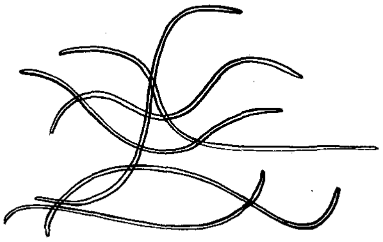
"They'll probably take you to the court, to Parquet, this afternoon," his father continued, despite the spasms in his face. "Then you might possibly go to the Pénitencier, to jail, for a few days, until we get you out."

From Montreal, Jules had told his parents what to say and do. Jules had called the lawyer, who'd successfully represented many of his old police buddies in corruption cases, and was paying her himself. He had also phoned many of his police friends and his former bosses, including the secretary of state, on whose security detail he had briefly worked. Then he had called Tiye's people, telling them that Tiye must have misunderstood. Pascal would never have asked them to shoot up the radio station. If they had meant to do him a favor, they'd failed.

Everyone Jules was able to reach, including Tiye's second-in-command, told him to stay calm. The case against Pascal was a *lamayòt*, a vapor. Nothing was going to stick. Give it a few more hours. Let it cool off.

Pascal was on a fast track, it seemed. After his parents left, a black-robed magistrate came in and informed him of the charges against him. Later that afternoon, more charges were filed. Now he was said to be not only the mastermind of the radio-station shooting but someone the police had been seeking for a long time. In him they'd found a scapegoat for a whole tally of unsolved crimes.

Because of the additional charges, the lawyer asked for more money. They should consider paying off a judge, she said. Twenty thousand dollars. American.



"This is a kind of kidnapping," Jules hollered on the phone from Montreal. Jules had not eaten all day. In despair, he was trying to deprive himself as well. He was expecting his brother to rot in an overcrowded cell at the Pénitencier or simply to disappear before he got there. Pascal's parents were preparing to sell their business to buy Pascal's release. That evening, having slept through the dinner hour in his cell, with his face pressed against a cool groove on the floor, Pascal saw a line of black shiny boots marching toward him. He was blindfolded again and thrown into the back seat of a police jeep.

"Who does he know?" the officer who put him there asked. "What are they going to tell people?"

"That they made a mistake," another voice answered.

He was dumped in front of his parents' restaurant at ten that night.

Tiye, it turned out, had made some kind of deal with the police for his and Pascal's release. Rumor had it that after he became the head of Baz Benin, Tiye had collected highly incriminating drug-related dirt on everyone, from the lowest street cop to Supreme Court judges. Whether it was true or not, it was said that he possessed a slew of records, from videos and audiotapes to copies of contracts and bank statements, which were being held by relatives of his in Miami. The day he was killed—or convicted of a crime—they were supposed to send the records to a certain reporter at the Miami *Herald*, who would publish everything.

Later that night, Jules cheered on the phone. "Manman and Papa will have to leave now," he said.

But Pascal wasn't sure where they would go. "Back to the countryside?" he wondered aloud to his brother. "To the hills? To you?"

These were all possibilities, Jules told him. "Urgent possibilities," he added. "Home is not always a place you have trouble leaving."

Pascal, now showered and clean, was lying in bed as his parents hovered, handing him water, juice, creams for his skin. It was nearly midnight. His mother had not cooked that evening, but her customers had still come for cigarettes and drinks and to offer their sympathies over Pascal's arrest and their congratulations on his release.

When Pascal got off the phone, one of the girls from the kitchen came up to say that Monsieur Tiye was downstairs and wanted to see him.

"We'll go first," his father said, the tic returning in a milder version.

His parents filed out dutifully, their bodies tense with a new level of worry. What could Tiye want now? Did he want to be paid?

In the yard, Tiye and his lieutenants were already settled at a table, with drinks provided for them by the girls.

"No need to pay tonight," the father said.

Tiye had a few extra guys with him for protection. They listened with rapt attention as he described what he'd been through. "I was afraid they were going to shoot me," he was saying. "You know how they take some of the guys out to the woods in Titanyen and put them down. I was afraid that was going to happen to me."

He said this casually, almost matter-of-factly, with a kind of amused air that indicated that, if this had happened, it would not have been a big deal. This was perhaps how Tiye and his guys faced the inevitable, Pascal thought. Crossing the yard on shaky legs, he realized that he shared this with them. This was perhaps what Tiye had tried to teach him by turning him in and then rescuing him. One day, they would all be shot. Like the night guard at Radio Zòrèy, like Tiye's predecessor, Piye. Like almost every young man who lived in the slums. One day, it might occur to someone, someone angry and powerful, someone obsessive and maniacal—a police chief or a gang leader, a leader of the opposition or a leader of the nation—that they, and all those who lived like them or near them, would be better off dead.

Pascal stopped at Tiye's table and held out a hand to him.

"No hard feelings?" Tiye said, pounding his fist on his chest, near his heart, in greeting.

Pascal noticed, and not for the first time, that Tiye's gums were bright red, as though he had a perpetual infection or had been eating raw meat.

"Did they jack you up?" Tiye asked Pascal.

"Wasn't so bad," he said.

Tiye wasn't wearing his prosthetic arm, and the sleeve of his bright-yellow shirt sagged. With his good hand, he motioned for the guy who was sitting next to him to get up so that Pascal could sit down.

Pascal looked again at the space where Tiye's missing arm would have been. He thought he saw something white, as though a polished piece of bone were protruding. He tilted his head to see it better, while trying not to seem obvious. He almost checked his own body to see if anything was gone.

In his dreams, Pascal had imagined beginning his radio program with a segment on lost limbs. Not just Tiye's but other people's as well. He would open with a discussion of how many people in Bel Air had lost limbs. Then he would go from limbs to souls, to the number of people who had lost family—siblings, parents, children—and friends. These were the real ghosts, he would say, the phantom limbs, phantom minds, phantom loves that haunt us, because they were used, then abandoned, because they were desolate, because they were violent, because they were merciless, because they were out of choices, because they did not want to be driven away, because they were poor.

It was his mother who brought the last beers to the table, and for the first time in his life he could see between her furrowed eyebrows a disdain for those she served. She avoided their eyes as she lifted the bottles from her metal tray and placed them between the coconut-shell ashtrays on the hibiscus-patterned plastic tablecloth. Pascal waited for her to return to the kitchen before raising his drink toward Tiye and clinking the top of his bottle with his. Tiye's bottle struck his with force. Pascal saw a brief spark, and the top of his bottle broke apart, leaving a jagged gap in the glass. A shard landed on the table with a splash of beer; another fell to the hardened clay floor at his feet.

Tiye flashed his bright-red gums and pointed his intact beer bottle in Pascal's direction. "You wanted to know what it's like for us," he said. "I just thought I'd give you a taste."

Tiye filled his mouth with beer and swished it around loudly, as if he were gargling with mouthwash.

"Don't worry," he added to Pascal, but also, it seemed, to himself. "As long as I'm here, nothing will happen to us tonight." ♦

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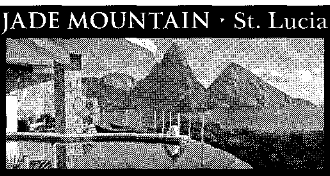

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THE CRITICS

LIFE AND LETTERS

LAND OF LOST SOULS

David Rabe's America.

BY JOHN LAHR

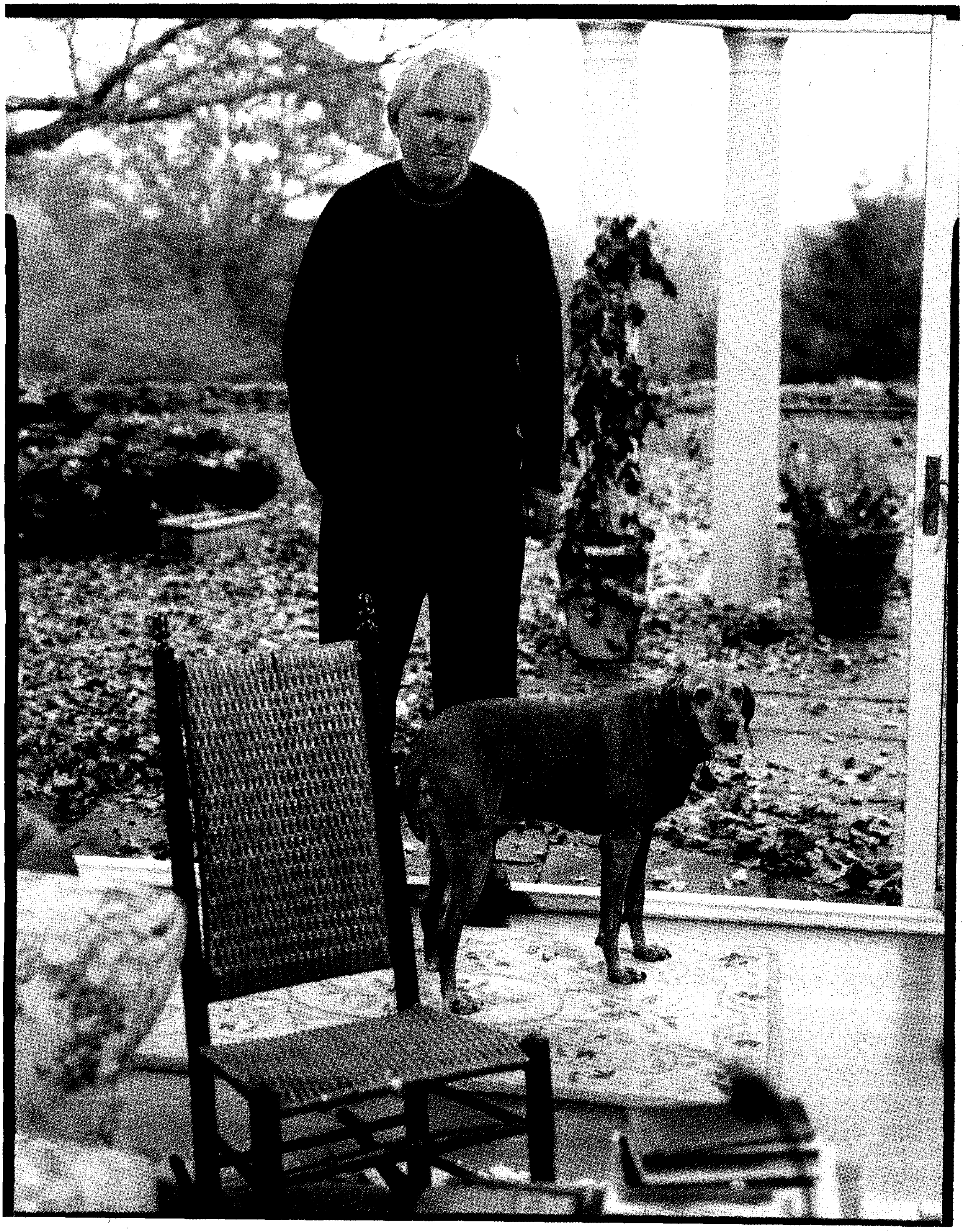
On the wall of David Rabe's television room, at his home in Connecticut, is a photograph of him as a football player at Loras Academy, the Catholic high school in Dubuque, Iowa, where he was a hard-driving running back and linebacker; in the image, he is being tackled, pushed into the dirt by three opponents. Rabe, now a large, white-haired sixty-eight-year-old with an athlete's body and a writer's stoop, writes the way he used to run: at full tilt, instinctively feeling for an opening, then plunging forward into the unknown. "I get a sentence, an idea, an image, and I start," he said. "I don't know anything beyond it. I follow it." Rabe's theatrical universe is at once vivid and mysterious, a pageant and a puzzle, where his bemused characters glimpse only the barest outline of what one of them calls "the unrelenting havoc" in which they flounder. "Often my characters don't know what the issues of the play are," Rabe told *Bomb* magazine in 2005. "They think they're doing one thing but something else is actually orchestrating their lives." Even Rabe can take some time to fathom what's going on between his characters. Of his four plays set during the Vietnam War, "Streamers" (currently in revival, in a Roundabout Theatre Company production) was begun first—soon after he was discharged, in 1967, from the Army's 68th Medical Group—and was finished last, in 1975. "My way seems to be to work, move on, and then go back," he said in the *Bomb* interview. " 'Streamers' . . . came out in three periods of writing consisting of four or five hours at each sitting, but these sittings were spread out over seven years."

In his writing, Rabe—who has produced a wide-ranging body of distinguished drama (four of his twelve plays have been nominated for Tony Awards, and "Sticks and Bones" won one, in 1972), four finely wrought film adaptations ("Casualties of War," "Streamers," "Hurlyburly," "I'm Dancing as Fast as I Can"), and three works of fiction—plays a primal game; his goal, he has said, is to show how "the past hangs on to you and shows up in spooky ways." He is obsessed with the things that haunt us. "People carry those things like physical realities almost," he told me. "They have a definite weight to them." Rabe's daringly stylized dramas hover in the realms between the natural and the metaphorical: angels mediate for the dead; a blinded Vietnam vet comes home to his TV-sitcom parents, Ozzie and Harriet; a gangland caper is played out in "an apartment in the underworld." Rabe's work is a challenge to what he calls the "clockwork universe, clockwork play," in which "certain motions delivered certain consequences in a predictable proportionate way." "What I was after is more like nuclear fission in which the explosion of something minuscule unlooses catastrophic, ungovernable devastation," he wrote in a 1992 afterword to some of his plays.

Rabe's explorations of the psyche mine *rasa*, a concept found in Sanskrit literature, which he defines as "the life thing"—the startling, underground anarchy of the unknown. Soldiers and psychopaths, gods and gangsters, icons and executives parade through his dramas—all, in their unique, vernacular way, eloquent in their unknowing. "Whatsa matter with me?" says Chrissy, a go-go girl in "In the Boom Boom Room" (1972), whose search for her authentic self strands her at a strip club, a masked, topless receptacle for other people's projections. "What'd I do that for?" Phil, a psychopathic ex-con turned actor, asks another palooka, in "Those the River Keeps," the 1991 prequel to "Hurlyburly." Just out of prison, Phil has punched and killed a dog that urinated on his hand while he was sleeping. After he hits it, the dog "gets this look . . . like he has been asked a question the likes of which he has never heard of it before and he ain't got a chance in hell of gettin' it right," Phil says. In the face of life's blows, Rabe's characters register a similar traumatized incredulity. His America is a dim and brutalizing landscape of the lost, not so much a "moronic inferno" as "an epic fucking fog," to quote Eddie, the master of "Hurlyburly" 's toxic ceremonies.

For Rabe, the drama between the surface and the subterranean began in Dubuque, in a blue-collar district near the Mississippi River. In the cramped quarters that he shared with his parents and, later, his younger sister, Marsha, there was, according to Marsha, "a tremendous lack of emotional, physical, psychological privacy." She added, "We had to have a lot of inner life, 'cause there wasn't much room for outer life." Rabe's father, William, slept on a pull-out sofa in the living room; his other accommodation to necessity was to give up a poorly paid job at Loras Academy, where he taught history and coached freshman football, for more lucrative work at the local slaughterhouse, a decision that "knocked him for an awful loop," Marsha said. William had been educated at the University of Illinois. "He'd walked out of college and into the Depression, and had had a rough time ever since," Rabe said. At one point, William had played farm-team baseball in Texas; he had also written a couple of unpublished novels. The combination of financial

PIERRE DI SCIULLO



Rabe at home, in Connecticut. His plays, he says, are a challenge to the "clockwork universe." Photograph by Tina Barney.

frustration and deferred dreams gave the household an unsettling undercurrent of disappointment. In these strained circumstances, speech and emotion had to be repressed. "The lid was on," Marsha said. Rabe grew up with a certain wariness, which passed as shyness. He became a keen listener and observer, taking up residence in his imagination. When he was a teen-ager, he directed several 8-mm. action movies. "Beatings, fistfights, prison breaks," Rabe said. "We had no money, so I was really frugal about how much I shot."

James Dean—and Dean's death, in 1955, when Rabe was fifteen—had a seismic effect on him. "It was as much his sensitivity as his rebelliousness," Rabe said. "It was the idea that you could take that and turn it into something—art. I didn't know what I was gonna do with it." Rabe became obsessed. He bought a tape recorder and, after each Dean movie, he'd recite the large sections of dialogue he remembered into it. "We would listen to the dialogue and rehearse the scenes," Marsha recalled. "I got to be Natalie Wood, Carroll Baker." Of these experiments, Rabe said, "It was, like, 'Can I act? Can I do this?'" He was tall, good-looking, and, he said, "emotionally truthful and willing to tap into it." Once the idea of becoming an actor had claimed him, he pursued it with fervor, scrutinizing Dean's trajectory from the Actors Studio to the Method and, finally, to Stanislavski's "An Actor Prepares." "It was like a psychosis," he said of the demands he put on himself. "I thought I was high-level Method acting. I studied, studied, studied."

In his undergraduate years at Loras College, Rabe submerged himself in creative writing and in theatre and became a proficient actor. "In the right thing, I was pretty good," he said. To his pragmatic parents, the idea of acting was "appalling, too flamboyant, too outgoing," but Rabe followed his desires. He enrolled in graduate studies in theatre at Villanova University, in Pennsylvania, and began to write plays in earnest. But, after two years, feeling "suffocated and needing to knock around"—"I felt I didn't know enough about anything to write," he said—Rabe dropped out and supported himself with a variety of odd jobs, including parking valet and bellhop. Then, in 1965, at the age of twenty-five, he was drafted.

Rabe was stationed in Vietnam in early 1966, before the height of American involvement in the war. His tour was spent doing clerical work and guard duty and building hospitals in an area that soon became the military hub Long Binh. His company was not under daily threat; he was not exposed, he said, "to the horrors of risk." In fact, things were so safe that Rabe felt "secondhand guilt about not being in a combat unit." His big discovery in Vietnam was not the enemy but the emotional anarchy. He has referred to Vietnam as a "carnival." "Barriers were down; restrictions were down; behavior outside the norms," he said. "There was this giddy thing. You could go around one corner and see something horrible, around another and see something thrilling. It was a little like the Wild West." He added, "Had I been there in Tet, it would have been a different story."

Rabe returned from duty in January, 1967, so changed by what he had witnessed that he decided he never wanted to act again. "The range of human response was so much more vast and varied than I had imagined," he said, adding, "My writing was liberated once I abandoned acting." While he sorted out his thoughts and the appropriate way to express them, he finished his master's degree, married, and put in two years as a journalist at the New Haven *Register*. During this period, he became "very, very angry" about Vietnam. "I started to feel that nobody over here had anything at stake," he said. "There was just nothing in jeopardy. Everything was so abundant." He added, "Suddenly I had a subject."

Rabe's first professionally produced play, "The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel," addressed his own basic training; the clueless, bereft, almost slapstick Hummel—a liar, a thief, and an attempted suicide—looks for himself in the military and finds only abuse, barbarity, and, eventually, death at the hands of a cohort. Hummel has no way to understand his own inchoate feelings. "Real insight never comes," Rabe wrote of this character. "Toughness and cynicism replace open eagerness, but he will learn only that he is lost; not how, why, or even where. His talent is for leaping into the fire." What radiance Hummel does register is seen through closed eyes. "You black on the inside," Ardell, a black guardian angel visible only to Hummel, says. "In there where you live, you that awful hurtin' black so you can't see yourself no way. Not up or down or in or out." Joseph Papp, the founder of

MASTER OF DISGUISES

Surely he walks among us unrecognized:
Some barber, store clerk, delivery man,
Pharmacist, hairdresser, bodybuilder,
Exotic dancer, gem cutter, dog walker,
The blind beggar singing, *Oh Lord, remember me*,

Some window decorator starting a fake fire
In a fake fireplace while mother and father watch
From the couch with their frozen smiles
As the street empties and the time comes
For the undertaker and the last waiter to head home.

O homeless old man, standing in a doorway
With your face half hidden,
I wouldn't even rule out the black cat crossing the street,
The bare light bulb swinging on a wire
In a subway tunnel as the train comes to a stop.

—*Charles Simic*

the Public Theatre, discovered the script of "Pavlo Hummel" in a pile on his desk in 1971. Before it opened, later that year, Papp told Rabe that he'd produce anything he wrote; he mounted five more of Rabe's plays in the course of the next decade, calling his work "the most important thing I did at the Public." In an e-mail, Rabe wrote, "I have come to believe that without him none of those first plays would have been done. After all, they'd been turned down everywhere, and, without them, probably nothing else would have found its way to the light of day."

In Rabe's second play, "Sticks and Bones," which delivers a mordant contrast between actual and psychological blindness, David, a blinded vet, tries to open his blinkered family to "a poetic sense of themselves," as Rabe calls it. "I have so much to tell you, to show you," David tells his parents, who don't want to see it. "If I have to lie to live, I will," Ozzie says. David speaks from the soul, where words are evocative, metaphoric, full of feeling and thought; Ozzie and Harriet and their other son, Rick, speak from the defended heart, where language is sterile, uninflected, and doctrinaire. David is deranged, tormented by the apparition of his lost Vietnamese love, Zung. With linguistic pieties and domestic punctilio, Ozzie and Harriet try to spackle over his despair. Rabe writes, in an introduction to the play, "David says of the girl he loved, 'She was a girl to weigh no more than dust.' Ozzie says, 'You pronged a yellow fucking whore.' The simple, real event is hidden by each character in the language he uses." As the play reaches its visionary conclusion, Zung materializes before the family. "Touch her, embrace her," David says. Ozzie strangles her. Ozzie, Harriet, and Rick then help David slit his wrists. Harriet bustles in with pans to catch the blood and towels to cover his lap. "You'll look so grand," she tells him. "No more funny talk." The curtain falls to the upbeat sound of Rick's guitar, which has, according to the stage directions, "a drive of happiness that is contagious":

> HARRIET: He's happier.
> OZZIE: We're all happier.
> RICK: Too bad he's gonna die.
> OZZIE: No, no; he's not gonna die, Rick. He's only gonna nearly die. Only nearly.
> RICK: Ohhhhhhhhhhh.
> HARRIET: Mmmmmmmmmmmm.

With its allegorical collision between trauma and retreat, "Sticks and Bones" marked better than any other play of its era the bitter spiritual divide between American generations.

To Rabe, Vietnam was a kind of X-ray of the American collective unconscious, "an obscene illumination against whose eloquence we closed our eyes." "Streamers," the last and best of his Vietnam plays, was the first to truly capture the lethal drift of the culture around him, the unacknowledged desperation, savagery, and selfishness that, in time, turned American streets into a slaughterhouse. Rabe's soldiers, unmoored by an absurd sense of death, shared with American society what he calls "a dizzying impression of being sent on a compassless march."

When the curtain rises on the Virginia-barracks setting of "Streamers" (at the Laura Pels, under the muscular direction of Scott Ellis), it rises on fear. A recruit is pacing, saying, "I just can't stand it." His wrist has been bandaged after a suicide attempt. "We've got to make up a story," Richie (Hale Appleman), a gay soldier, says. He's talking about the recruit, but Rabe is talking about the military itself, and the fiction that it imposes order on chaos. Within the hubbub of his story line, Rabe captures the particularly toxic chemistry of boredom and dread. At the well-scrubbed and meticulous barracks (even the mop hangs from a clip at a right angle to the floor), the recruits work to keep their spirits and their space "looking good," while awaiting their assignment. In the mounting anxiety over where they'll be sent—it's 1965, and the men are being dispatched to Vietnam, or "Disneyland," as they call it—the barracks are a kind of safe house, the bonds of friendship the only fortification that the soldiers can build between themselves and terror. Two drunk sergeants, Cokes and Rooney (Larry Clarke and John Sharian), stagger into the barracks and tell of a daredevil paratrooper who released his parachute from his backpack, intending to grab the lines with his hands (a "streamer" is a parachute that fails to open). They pantomime his fall to earth. "He went right by me," Cokes says. "We met eyes, sort of. He was lookin' real puzzled." Then, to the tune of "Beautiful Dreamer," they mock

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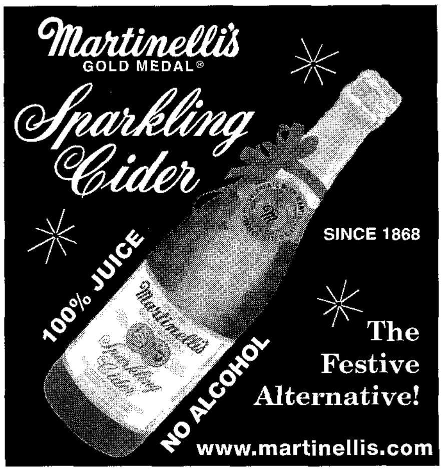
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his hapless descent and his death itself. The bravado of the men brilliantly serves to magnify the panic that it is meant to mask. Everybody onstage here is in free fall.

Caprice arrives in the hulking shape of Carlyle (Ato Essandoh), a transgressive black soldier full of rage and riffs, who comes wanting to befriend Roger (J. D. Williams), another black recruit. "Do you know they still got me in that goddamn P Company?" Carlyle says. "That goddamn transient company. It like they think I ain't got no notion what a home is. No nose for no home—like I ain't never had no home. I had a home. IT LIKE THEY THINK THERE AIN'T NO PLACE FOR ME IN THIS MOTHER ARMY BUT KP." Eaten up by envy, at once funny and fulminating, Carlyle is one of Rabe's most thrilling inventions. Rabe, who writes black characters better than any of his white peers, made his first black friends in the Army. He lets Carlyle express the "looser, noisier, easier" black sense of self he was drawn to. "That the black man's problem altogether," Carlyle tells a white boy in the barracks. "You ever consider that? Too much feelin'. He too close to everything. He is, man; too close to his blood, to his body. It ain't that he don't have no good mind, but he BELIEVE in his body."

As Essandoh superbly plays him, Carlyle is all danger and desperation. At one point, making machine-gun sounds, he slithers drunkenly into the barracks, bringing with him all the primal fears that the homey little cadre room is pitched against. "Practicin' my duties, my new abilities," he says, adding, "Oh, sure, you guys don't care. I know it. You got it made. . . . You got a little home here, got friends, people to talk to. I got nothin'. You got jobs, they probably ain't ever gonna ship you out, you got so important jobs. I got no job. They don't even wanna give me a job. I know it. They are gonna kill me. They are gonna send me over there to get me killed, goddamnit."

Rabe is expert at building the awful pressure of impending woe. The competent cast of this production hits the notes but not always the music of his writing. Nonetheless, his vision is vivid and devastating. When violence comes to "Streamers," it comes quietly at first. Richie suggests that his two bunkmates leave for a while so that he and Carlyle can have sex. One of them, Billy (Brad Fleischer), is outraged, and throws a shoe at Carlyle. That shoe becomes for Carlyle a symbol of everything the white world has thrown at him. He turns on Billy with a switchblade, cutting his hand. In a fury, Billy denounces Richie as a "gay little piece of a shit cake" and Carlyle as "Sambo." He seems to move past Carlyle, only to fall back and collapse from a mortal wound. "Fuck it, fuck it, I stuck him. I turned it," Carlyle says, his eyes bulging in panic. "This mother army break my heart. I can't be out there where it pretty, don't wanna live!" Rooney accidentally walks into the mayhem. Breaking his beer bottle to defend himself against Carlyle, he cuts his hand. Carlyle bolts out the door. The moment is terrible and hilarious. Rooney bawls, "I hurt myself. I cut myself." Then, as proof that, as Rabe has said, "violence, once it is let loose, has its own mind," Carlyle races back into the room in full psychotic mania and stabs Rooney to death. Even as he is arrested and hauled off, his mad voice proclaims his loneliness. "This is my place, not your place," he shouts from offstage.

Rabe sees war, and its sanctioned murder, as part of "the eternal human pageant"—the search for identity. "The poison was not so much that we did what we did as the way we denied that we were doing what we could see ourselves doing on television," he has written. His Vietnam plays bear witness to the fog of war; his later plays are testimony to the postwar psychological blowback—a fog of denial, in which the characters are lost to themselves. ("I was in that fog, among the compassless," he said.) In the early eighties, Rabe began listening to tapes about Eastern philosophy by the spiritual leader Ram Dass and puzzling over the freedom of Shakespeare. "I'd started to see that Shakespearean language was free largely because it was creating the reality surrounding the character—the reality of the character's psyche—not so much expressing what already existed," Rabe wrote in an e-mail. He discovered a similar verbal freedom in gangster lingo, which allowed him, he said, "to struggle with certain complexities and make those complexities fresh, though they might never make it fully into light."

"Goose and Tomtom" (1982) was

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Rabe's first full-fledged experiment with mobster patois, and also with the notion that "words create reality rather than reflecting it." The play's title characters, two fearful, loutish, deracinated thugs—the Vladimir and Estragon of petty theft—have abducted the sister of a gangster whom they wrongly suspect of robbing them. Thought, for these two, is notional; they seem to have almost no reflective capacity. Although they exhibit a cornucopia of presenting symptoms—paranoia, guilt, psychotic rage, projective identification—they have no psychological or symbolic imagination. This absence of penetration makes for its own kind of poetry. "I ain't in the expressions on my face and I ain't in my eyes. I don't know where I am," Goose says. Goose and Tomtom spin the wheels of rationality and get nowhere. Out of their manic strategies of self-defense—their surreal fear and loathing, their slapstick violence, their Dadaist banter—a palpable sense of doom emerges, "a doom they can't specify, a doom they persist in seeking to find and to define in order to strike before it arrives," according to Rabe. Unable to deflect their aggression onto other things, they turn it on each other. "I feel like you're gonna—like you're gonna knock me down on the floor and kneel on my shoulders and punch me inna face," Goose says to Tomtom, who categorically denies the intention. "I got it in my head you wanna," Goose says. "Who's puttin' it in my head you do if you don't? I don't know. You don't know. It's confusin'. You promise you ain't." Tomtom promises, then picks up a chair and hits Goose over the head. "Goddamn chair, committin' suicide," Goose says.

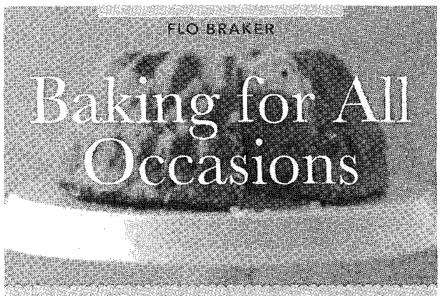
" 'Goose and Tomtom' sort of opened the door for me," Rabe said. "I didn't know what they were going to say next, and it wasn't going to be rational, necessarily. They were going to imitate each other; they were going to say whatever they wanted. The language was creating the next moment, not their wills, not their thoughts, not their plans."

"Goose and Tomtom" foreshadowed the literary freedom and the existential misery of Rabe's masterpiece, "Hurlyburly" (1984). In this extraordinary examination of Hollywood's aimless delirium ("My brain has been invaded with glop," one character says), Rabe's characters struggle more consciously than in earlier plays to express the psychic undertow that seems to drag them away from their best interests, but find themselves still unable to describe it: "There's a name for this—it happens—there's a word for it—everybody knows it," Phil, the ex-con turned actor, says. A sort of cosmic fog settles over everyone—a fog, Rabe said, "of half truths, half memories, ideas spun to serve a purpose and so not ideas at all but subterfuges, or spells." Phil conjures it up as he makes his first entrance into the Hollywood Hills home of Eddie, a casting director:

> You know this fog, and I was in it and it was talking to me with her face on it. Right in front of me was like this cloud with her face on it, but it wasn't just her, but this cloud saying all these mean things about my ideas and everything about me, so I was like shit and this cloud knew it.

"To me the unconscious is a sort of fun house," Rabe said. "It has this power of expanding something. Everything gets distorted—it gets bigger than the proportions of the play might justify." "Hurlyburly" is a dark, hilarious, and eloquent testament to this proliferating explosiveness. Phil is one of Rabe's major tragicomic messengers, "the chaotic deliverer of unconscious information that ultimately kills him," Rabe said. A self-confessed "totally out-of-control prick," in the course of the play Phil head-butts a girl, pushes a blind date out of a car, cold-cocks a guy in a bar whose overheard conversation offends him for reasons that he can't recall, and, eventually, kidnaps his baby from his wife, who is in the process of divorcing him. "How come everything turns to shit?" he asks in the middle of his manic mayhem. Phil knows that he's inhabited by some force that works against him. Rather like a meteorologist, he reports on its path as it sweeps across the kingdom of his disoriented self: "We get those dark thoughts . . . you don't think you're thinkin' 'em, so we can't even nail that down, how we going to get beyond it? They are the results of your unnoticed inner goings-on." In the end, embracing suicide as a kind of destiny, he drives at high speed off a canyon road.

Coked to the eyeballs, bingeing on TV and women, Phil's counterpart, the hyperbolic Eddie, is the fulcrum of the



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play, a scintillating confection of poetry and paralysis. Phil's volatility is, for Eddie, a sensational distraction from his own desperation. "No matter how far you manage to fall, Phil will be lower," Mickey, Eddie's aloof business partner and housemate, tells him. Eddie's ability to answer Phil's constant stream of questions is what gives him confidence. Verbal command is his defense against his own lostness. Plumes of thought sprout from Eddie's monologues, gorgeous arias full of meaning and meaninglessness, whose exhilarating prolixity gives listeners a sense of Hollywood as a vacuum calling attention to itself:

> I mean, the aborigine had a lot of problems—nobody is going to say he didn't—tigers in the trees, dogs after his food; and in the Middle Ages, there was goblins and witches in the woods. But this neutron bomb has come along and this sonofabitch has got this ATTITUDE . . . about what is worthwhile in the world and what is worth preserving. And do you know what this fastidious prick has at the top of its hierarchy—what sits at the pinnacle? THINGS! . . . It annihilates people and saves THINGS. It loves things. It is a thing that loves things. And whether we know it or not, we KNOW it—that's eating at us. And where other, older, earlier people—the Ancients might have had some consolation from a view of the heavens as inhabited by this thoughtful, you know, meditative, maybe a trifle unpredictable and wrathful, but nevertheless UP THERE—this divine onlooker—we have bureaucrats. . . . The air's bad, the ozone's fucked, the water's poison, and into whose eyes do we find ourselves staring when we look for providence? We have emptied out the heavens and put oblivion in the hands of a bunch of aging insurance salesmen whose jobs are insecure.

Mike Nichols, who directed the brilliant first production of "Streamers" (the play is dedicated to him), also directed the Broadway première of "Hurlyburly." The play, the *Times* said, "offers some of Mr. Rabe's most inventive and disturbing writing, in a production of any playwright's dreams." But, unfortunately, not the dreams of Rabe himself, who broke with Nichols over it. "I was desperate for him to cut," Nichols told me, when I interviewed him for a profile in 2000. "I kept saying, 'I won't do this to the audience.' " Rabe admitted that the original script he gave Nichols was "massive" and "needed more work." He added, "I was willing to cut, but I didn't feel I could do it prematurely. We just hit a wall about one scene." In the scene in question, Phil talks about his fear of having a child. Rabe agreed to cut it temporarily, with the proviso that it would be rehearsed later. The scene, however, didn't make it into the production. "Without it, Eddie's caring about Phil doesn't have any resonance," Rabe said. He refused to make any further cuts and went mute in protest. "He couldn't reach me," he said of Nichols. "I wasn't listening." Nichols saw the 2005 New York revival, which staged "Hurlyburly" with the scene restored, and, according to Rabe, said to two of its stars, "Tell David he was right." "We were both right," Rabe says now. "But under the pressures of production and personality, a genuine, equitable solution wasn't possible." Nichols gave Rabe a hit show, but it cost them their relationship.

Rabe had already lost his first creative mentor, Joseph Papp. "I've never known anyone as contradictory," Rabe has said of Papp. "He had a powerful artistic human side that was in unresolved conflict with a tremendous ambition and desire for control. I've met people who were as generous and helpful and creative as Joe, and I've met people who were as dangerous as Joe, but I've never encountered these things in any other single person." Papp admired Rabe's mastery, but he was frustrated by his metabolism. Papp's rhythm was restless and swift; Rabe was reflective and slow. " 'For David to change course, to change his mind, it's like an aircraft carrier turning around,'" Rabe recalled Papp saying. " 'It takes a long time.' " Increasingly, Rabe found himself caught between Papp's need for product and his own process of discovery. In this conflict, institution trumped artist. "The Orphan" (1973), a play that didn't find wide critical or popular success, failed, according to Rabe, because it was mounted before being fully explored. The final break between Rabe and Papp occurred over the latter's botched 1982 production of "Goose and Tomtom," a difficult play, which Papp had scheduled and cancelled once before. Papp wanted to make certain changes in the play. "I said, 'You can make those changes, Joe, as long as you don't open it to the press,' " Rabe said. "Then one day I picked up the paper and saw that it was opening to the press. I tried to send telegrams to the various critics saying I didn't approve. Anyway, it opened. I felt I couldn't trust him to work with."

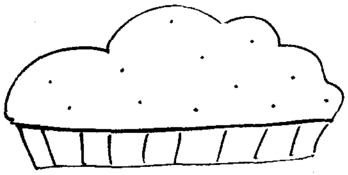
"I've done far less than I thought I would when my first play was performed professionally," Rabe wrote, in the clear-eyed afterword to his second volume of Vietnam plays. "I never found a professional environment that made the production of plays efficient. Teamwork is demanded, but there are very few teams." Although in recent years Rabe has found allies in the New Group and the Roundabout Theatre Company, to a certain extent he has withdrawn from the playing field. In 1994, he moved to a sixteen-acre estate in the northwest corner of Connecticut, with his second wife, the actress Jill Clayburgh. "I feel a little strange about the theatre," he told me when I visited him there. "I feel the longer I'm out of it, the less likely I'll be let back in it. Moving up here has truncated my relationship with the theatre."

His focus, he said, had shifted. "The change was more a turning toward something than a turning away from anything," he wrote in an e-mail. "I have a sort of reclusive side to my nature that was coming to the foreground. I was older. Time could be seen to be running out." These days, Rabe works in a converted two-story garage, a few yards from his back door. When there is no one at home (Clayburgh is gone for months at a time, shooting the TV series "Dirty Sexy Money," and their two children have moved away), Rabe often sleeps in a bed in the corner of the ground floor—a small clearing in a forest of files and papers. Upstairs, past a water cooler, a James Dean poster, and photographs of his dogs, the five-hundred-square-foot space is a sea of books—books in bookcases, books in piles, books stashed, according to subject matter, in dozens of black bags that litter the floor. Three writing desks, two computers, and chairs loom like islands in a literary deluge. "There's no demand for a body of work, though writers will be criticized for not having produced one," Rabe noted about playwriting, in 1992. In recent years, he has spent more of his time writing fiction than plays. He has several novels under way. "I hope to finish a lot of these things, but who knows," he said. Writing his latest novel, "Dinosaurs on the Roof," "was a deeply satisfying time." "I just felt I was really on something alive, which is all you can ask for, frankly," he said. ◆

BRIEFLY NOTED

A Day at elBulli, *by Ferran Adrià, Juli Soler, and Albert Adrià (Phaidon; $49.95).* In the world of culinary porn, this five-hundred-plus-page tome of photographs from the fabled avant-garde restaurant elBulli, in Spain, is curiously banal. Little of the chef Ferran Adrià's radical genius can be detected in the brochurelike text ("To produce a great wine you need the best grapes") and the mostly prosaic images (sommeliers at their laptops, for example). But when the food arrives one feels a sense of wonder. Circles of dehydrated mango purée, daubed with a purplish black-olive emulsion, conjure miniature Rothkos; puffs of cotton candy, dusted with a freeze-dried passion-fruit powder, hang from spindly branches. Intrepid or technologically well-equipped readers may brave the recipes for such creations as liquorice-infusion-jelly lasagne and ignore the overserious eating instructions.

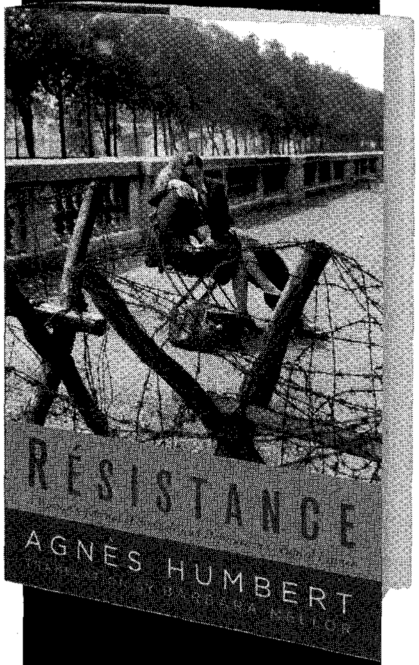
Swindled, *by Bee Wilson (Princeton; $26.95).* With the revelations in recent months of tainted food—salmonella-infected jalapeños, melamine-laced milk—Wilson's latest treatise, on contaminated, adulterated, and fake foods in the modern era, feels almost prophetic. If there's a whiff of pedantry to the enterprise, Wilson overwhelms it with sheer detail: the flavor of lead salts, so delicious that they were used to sweeten wine; the fad for mock food in wartime Britain (mock chops made of flour, potato, and onion); the fact that Campbell's concealed marbles in the soup photographed for advertisements, to make it look thicker; Donald Rumsfeld's role as a champion of aspartame. No government intervention can solve the problem, Wilson concludes, without consumer reëducation in how real food tastes. "Buy food fresh, in whole form," she writes. "Cook it yourself and familiarize yourself with the ingredients that go into proper food, so that when you are served a fake you will know the difference, and have the confidence to complain."



A Revolution in Taste, *by Susan Pinkard (Cambridge; $32).* Pinkard reveals that before the storming of the Bastille a revolution took place at dinner tables all over France, when ornate, liberally spiced medieval styles of cooking were displaced by farm-fresh food prepared so that it "not only tasted, but also looked, like what it was." *Le goût naturel* is strikingly relevant to the way we eat today. For instance, the Newtonian physician George Cheyne, who pioneered a new science of dietetics, advocated the reduced consumption of corn-fed poultry and cattle and argued that vegetables be eaten according to the season. Pinkard relishes debunking persistent myths: champagne was not invented by a Benedictine monk named Dom Pérignon but, rather, caught on thanks to the invention and diffusion of the modern wine bottle. Her lively account concludes with a series of meticulously sourced ancien-régime recipes demonstrating the finesse with which French food is now synonymous.

Amarcord, *by Marcella Hazan (Gotham; $27.50).* Born in Cesenatico, a fishing village near Rimini, in 1931, Hazan married the son of a New York furrier and began cooking for him. Soon, she was giving classes in her Manhattan kitchen, and when Craig Claiborne came to lunch and wrote her up in the *Times* Hazan was on the map. The city of Bologna built her a kitchen, and she led celebrated cooking classes in Venice. With her husband as translator, Hazan wrote "The Classic Italian Cookbook" (among others), though her publishing adventures were fraught. In this memoir, she does not have the advantage that Julia Child did, of having a voice so familiar that we hear every sentence in her inimitable delivery, but she comes through now and then: "I soon discovered a natural inclination for frying."

"*RÉSISTANCE* READS LIKE THE RAW MATERIAL FOR AN ALAN FURST WORLD WAR II NOVEL."
—*Houston Chronicle*



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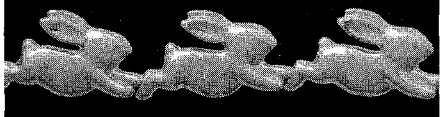

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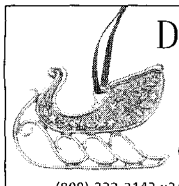

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ON TELEVISION

SCIENCE PROJECTS

"Fringe" and "The Mentalist."

BY KELEFA SANNEH

During the last episode of the first season of "Lost," after the castaways had endured yet another near-death experience on their not quite deserted island, the loopy old survivalist known as Locke turned to the valiant doctor, Jack, and delivered his verdict. "You're a man of science," he said, with more than a trace of pity. The island was getting weird, the plot threads were getting tangled, and it was becoming clear that no mere scientist—let alone a casual TV viewer—could hope to make sense of it all.

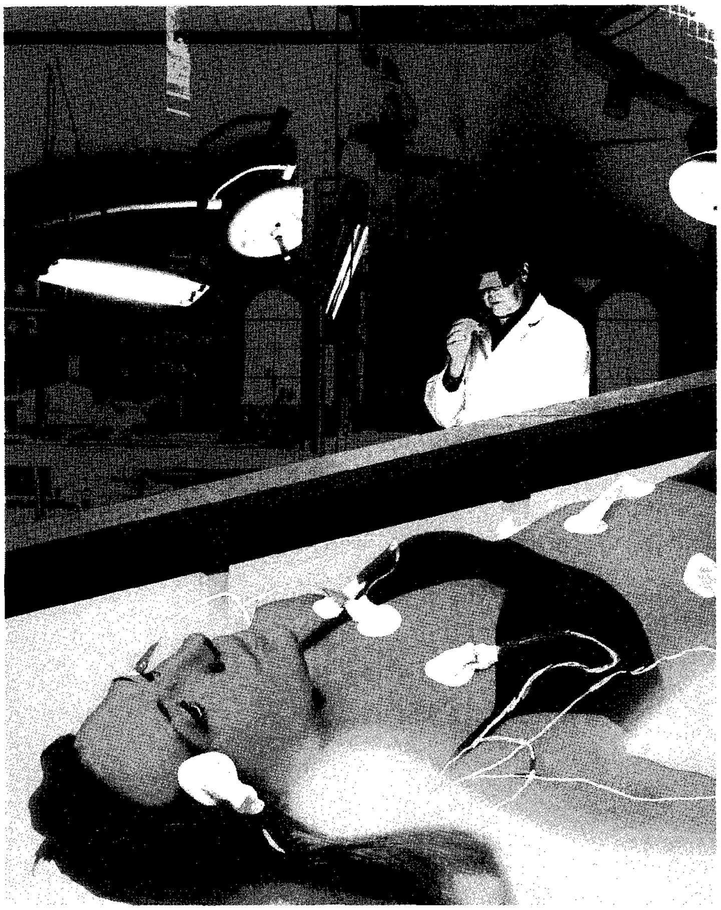
"Lost" is scheduled to begin its fifth season on ABC early next year, and, in the meantime, J. J. Abrams, a creator and executive producer of the show, has a new project, on Fox: an F.B.I. drama called "Fringe," which gives him a further chance to explore his mixed feelings about the scientific method. Another show, another ragtag bunch of seekers on a mysterious quest that involves an awful lot of running. In deference to the climate and the sensibilities of greater Boston, where "Fringe" is set, these characters are more thoroughly clothed than the ones in "Lost." But the monomania is the same: all they want to know is what happens next.

"Fringe," like "The X-Files" before it, sometimes seems like a sci-fi parody of a police procedural: the episodes usually start with a crime but end with nothing that resembles an ending. The heroine is an agent named Olivia Dunham, played by Anna Torv, whose flat face and wide-set eyes telegraph her open-mindedness. She's neither credulous (like Mulder, from "The X-Files") nor incredulous (like Scully); she's just a hardworking Fed caught up in a ludicrous but rather enjoyable paranormal crime show. The series began in September, with a passenger on a flight to Boston injecting himself with what appeared to be insulin; the syringe actually contained a man-made virus that, within minutes, reduced the plane's population to zero. The midair gore (the Parents Television Council called "Fringe" that week's worst show, citing a vivid depiction of "instant, extreme, liquefactive necrosis") was less spooky than the idea of the ghost plane gently touching down at Logan Airport, guided by computers that must have been slimeproof. Dunham needed help with the case, and, as so often happens at the F.B.I., the experts decided that the right man for the job was a mad scientist who had spent the better part of two decades in a mental institution; in keeping with common practice, the institution agreed to release the man, Walter Bishop, on the condition that his estranged son, Peter, keep an eye on him and give him his prescribed dose of two or three wordy rejoinders per scene. (Peter is played by Joshua Jackson, formerly of "Dawson's Creek," so this last stipulation was no obstacle.)

It turned out that the F.B.I. had noticed a pattern of strange events (known, rather disappointingly, as "the Pattern") that seemed to be connected to something called Massive Dynamic, which is a sinister multinational corporation—not, despite what you may have guessed, a jam band. Unlike Locke from "Lost," however, Bishop, played by John Noble, is an unbowed "man of science." Every gruesome discovery provokes in him the same response: gaping mouth, narrowed eyes, and some variation on "We need to get this back to the lab." He is a godless mystic, convinced that every freak phenomenon has a materialist explanation, that there are no coincidences. In short, he is the ideal "Fringe" viewer.

Since this is the show's first season, each episode is also an audition, a plea for permission to continue. At the end of the pilot, Dunham's boss, played by Lance Reddick (the straight-backed actor who portrayed Cedric Daniels on "The Wire"), gazed out at the civilian world and asked, "You see all these people going about their lives? No idea what's happening around them—what they're in the middle of?" He was talking to us, the viewers, promising us a season of mayhem.

The ruthless TV marketplace encourages writers and producers to cram the maximum number of cliffhangers and ominous portents into the early episodes; they can worry about how to resolve them all if their series gets renewed. Viewers of "Lost" have sometimes complained that the show, in later seasons, started to drag; a 2007 cover story in *Entertainment Weekly* asked, "Are the producers just screwing with us until the grand finale, stretching out story lines like taffy because they're out of ideas?" (The answer: a provisional no.) "Fringe" has already passed its first test: Fox initially commissioned thirteen episodes, but last month the network announced that it had ordered nine more, for a complete first season.



Anna Torv and John Noble in J. J. Abrams's new series.

Episodes of "Fringe" are designed to be more self-contained than episodes of "Lost"; it's possible to enjoy the scientific scavenger hunts without knowing or caring much about the Pattern. In fact, the plots tend to be less memorable than the images: a hairless albino rat, bleeding from red eyes; a woman with a fast-forward pregnancy, giving birth to a baby who instantly grows old and dies. Inevitably, Bishop's scientific explanations are at once outlandish and underwhelming. Early on, he claimed that his "synaptic-transfer system" would allow Dunham to read the thoughts of her ex, who may have been a traitor. "It's not an exact science," Bishop said, before preparing his probes and sensors. "It's not *even* science," his son added. Dunham just lay back in a mind-synchronization tank, closed her eyes, and waited: all she wants to know is what happens next.

"Fringe" is broadcast at 9 P.M. on Tuesdays. This means that its main competition is another quasi-scientific investigative drama, "The Mentalist," on CBS; they are the season's two most popular new shows among eighteen- to forty-nine-year-olds. Whereas "Fringe" seems self-conscious about the debt it owes to its science-fiction forebears, "The Mentalist" is cheerfully familiar: it's an old-fashioned procedural starring Simon Baker as Patrick Jane, a fake psychic turned raffish consultant to the California Bureau of Investigation. Perhaps you have observed that there is already a TV show about a crime-solving fake psychic ("Pysch," on USA). And perhaps you have noticed that "C.B.I." sounds a lot like "C.S.I." Happily, California has no law against sincere flattery.

The show is essentially a support system for Baker, a thirty-nine-year-old Australian actor with tousled blond hair, a sly but kind smile, a rumpled silk vest, and eyes like apostrophes. He's so charming that his charm is itself a running joke. In his first scene, he surprises a grieving mother in her kitchen and says, softly, "My name is Patrick Jane. I'm here to help you. Would you like a cup of tea?" Of course she would.

His main supervisor—and, as nine out of ten fake psychics could tell you, his eventual love interest—is Teresa Lisbon, played by Robin Tunney, who was a glamorous screwup in a pair of pleasantly lurid teen movies from the nineteen-nineties, "Empire Records" and "The Craft." On "The Mentalist," she's a brusque boss, with a small, down-turned mouth that she frequently employs for purposes of castigation. At the Palm Springs airport, she learns that a colleague needs to stop by the baggage carrousel, and she is not amused: "You checked luggage? What are you, on vacation?"

And what of the mentalist's method? It turns out to be a combination of careful observation and advanced hunchology, which puts Patrick Jane squarely in the tradition of Adrian Monk (from "Monk"), Robert Goren (from "Law & Order: Criminal Intent"), and, for that matter, Sherlock Holmes. The camera often follows Jane's line of vision, forcing us to notice what he notices, and the suspense comes less in figuring out a murderer's identity than in watching Jane persuade a culprit to fess up, sometimes unwittingly. If he has an uncanny ability, it's getting suspects to waive their right to counsel.

But the more Jane positions himself as a debunker the less he seems like one. A heroic detective is of necessity a kind of superhero, turning even the most bizarre murder into an open-and-shut case. This usually requires a series of happenstances that are indistinguishable from luck, or magic, and if we need some sort of mumbo-jumbo to help us forget that—well, the mumbo-jumbo of mentalism works as well as any other. When Jane performs a parlor trick at the station (he finds hidden car keys using a colleague's unconscious physical cues), Teresa asks if she's supposed to believe that he's really a psychic. "Oh, no, no, no," he says, unconvincingly. "This is all science." ♦

JOHN RITTER

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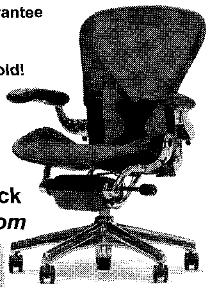

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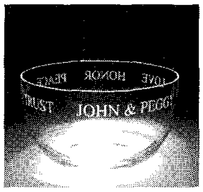

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POP MUSIC

SASS AND CADENCE

Pink's progress.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

"Funhouse," the new album by Alecia Moore, who calls herself Pink, has already spawned an enormous hit—her first solo No. 1 in the U.S.—called "So What," an explosion of brattiness and rock-star entitlement that is both maddening and hard to shake. There are cracks in "Funhouse," though, which expose the near-impossible task of playing a rebel who also feels she deserves the chart successes of the rivals she derides, and the challenge of maintaining a persona while employing blue-chip songwriters to help articulate it. Pink's being Pink depends on our believing that she has escaped some sort of assembly-line purgatory. Her best songs suggest that she has simply fashioned a better assembly line.

For years, Pink's career has been predicated on the idea that she is both a pop star and not a pop star. The exception was her first album, "Can't Take Me Home" (2000), which was modelled on the work of acts like Destiny's Child and Christina Aguilera. Although it presented the image of an unbiddable young woman, the R. & B. rhythm tracks could have been anybody's, and Pink sang in a high, fluttery style that was far removed from the throaty snarl that became her resting place.

The song that brought Pink to a larger audience was a 2001 collaborative remake of Labelle's "Lady Marmalade." It was stylistically faithful to the funk rock of the original seventies hit, but the collaborators—Christina Aguilera, Mya, Missy Elliot, and Lil' Kim—represented of-the-minute rap and R. & B. Though the remake adds nothing to the original (except Lil' Kim's charmingly crass rap), it bristles with energy and is good, dumb fun. Pink made her mark with her turn on the second verse, where, finally, she sang in her natural voice, which is reminiscent of a more together Janis Joplin: low, slightly burred, full of attitude, and hard. Nevertheless, it was probably the song's video—Pink wearing a top hat and bulletproof underwear—that lodged her in the public's consciousness.

Later that year, Pink rejected her assigned genre and, on her second album, "Missundaztood," tried something new. In the song "Don't Let Me Get Me," she described the earlier album as a Faustian bargain, with L. A. Reid, the head of LaFace Records, sporting the horns. "L.A. told me, 'You'll be a pop star,'" Pink sang. " 'All you have to change is everything you are.' " Mostly co-written with the songwriter Linda Perry, "Missundaztood" was a blend of rock and dance that made a deft and euphoric break from R. & B. Propelled by the hit "Get the Party Started," the album has sold more than five million copies in this country, and is still her best-selling album by a healthy margin. It placed Pink high in the pecking order, and branded Perry as a reliable hitmaker. (Perry, as it happened, went on to become a frequent collaborator with Christina Aguilera.)

Written and produced by Perry, "Get the Party Started" was driven by a bouncing beat and keyboards that hint at various dance musics without being restricted to any of them, and a singing style that balances the sass of rock music with the cadence of rap. The video (a form that has continued to be important for Pink) makes her stylistic schism clear. No more choreographed dancers in futuristic pleather: we get to see Pink be at once festive and vulnerable—singing into a hair dryer, nervously checking for untoward body odors, and bouncing around town on a skateboard pilfered from an awestruck boy fan. This strategy works: with Pink acting like herself and a professional

ed an assembly-line purgatory. Photog

like Perry providing fully formed songs, Team Pink is a blast.

Since "Missundaztood," the problem has been making sure that the hired guns are as good as Perry, and that Pink—a performer who isn't a natural songwriter—hasn't assumed too much control. (Things tend to get particularly bad when Pink sings a ballad or exhumes her childhood, or both simultaneously.) Pink's third album, "Try This," was a rock album written largely with Rancid's Tim Armstrong. The best song on it was "Feel Good Time," co-written by Beck and William Orbit for a "Charlie's Angels" movie. Like "Get the Party Started," the song has a strong undercurrent of dance music. Punky and uncouth as Pink likes to present herself, she is most comfortable with music that has a light bounce to it and room for jubilation. Though she often feels compelled to share her pain, it's something that she can't pull off without a beat to push against.

"Try This" was a commercial brick, and the follow-up album had an awkwardly honest title: "I'm Not Dead." Pink's new Linda Perry turned out to be the most reliable designated hitter of the past decade: Max Martin, the press-shy Swede who helped define the sounds of Britney Spears and Backstreet Boys. "U + Ur Hand" is Pink's drunken rebuke to a random suitor, who is invited to take home his real date: his own hand. The music is rumbustious rock, and the hooks are huge. "Who Knew," also co-written with Martin, leans into the wind and hollers out loud, but is riven with pain. Her man gone, unexpectedly, Pink is left to wonder, pulled up short.

Two songs on "I'm Not Dead" showed the strain of constructing the perfectly balanced anti-commercial commercial act. "Conversations with My 13 Year Old Self" is confessional writing at its least necessary. If Pink somehow managed to deliver these oily pearls of wisdom ("You're the girl I used to be, you little heartbroken thirteen-year-old me") to herself, I can't imagine the younger Pink listening. More troubling yet was "Stupid Girls" (co-written with a group that included Billy Mann—as sure a predictor of a Pink failure as any name in her credits), a song that tries to recapture the mission-statement feeling of "Missundaztood" but fails owing to a lack of generosity. The song and the video seek to distinguish Pink from Lindsay, Paris, and Jessica, and the lyrics sincerely ask, "Where, oh where, have the smart people gone?" Pink has shown no small amount of flesh in her rise to the top, so calling out anyone else's bra tactics is a highly suspect move. She's no stranger to the Hilton Doctrine ("I'll do what I want, cuz I can"). And "smart" isn't really Pink's stock-in-trade. She's a female version of Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, a skilled ham, long on humor, spritz, and vigor, but hardly a visionary.

"Funhouse" continues in this vein. Apparently in the grip of pain over her divorce from the motocross biker Carey Hart, in "So What" Pink (with Max Martin's help) goes on a violent bender: "I guess I just lost my husband, I don't know where he went. So I'm gonna drink my money, I'm not gonna pay his rent." Like so many unreliable pop narrators, she will protest too much about not caring ("I'm all right, I'm just fine, and you're a tool") and then reveal how badly she's been stung. There's something sour about the whole thing, though. We know Pink's a rock star; chanting "So what, I'm still a rock star" feels not just insecure but slightly gross. What happened to the fun-rock-star stuff?

If Pink has managed to maintain a career in pop by distancing herself from pop's larger trends and by not becoming self-destructive, that distance depended on there being a certain joy in her work—the feeling not that she was better than her peers but that she had simply started her own, better party somewhere. The album's best moment is "Please Don't Leave Me." The chorus is mostly just the title, with Pink hurting out loud—how quickly the party ends—and keeping the beat going. "How did I become so obnoxious?" she sings, apparently sifting through the dynamic of a failed marriage. It reads equally well as a message to her public. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Sasha Frere-Jones's pop-music blog.

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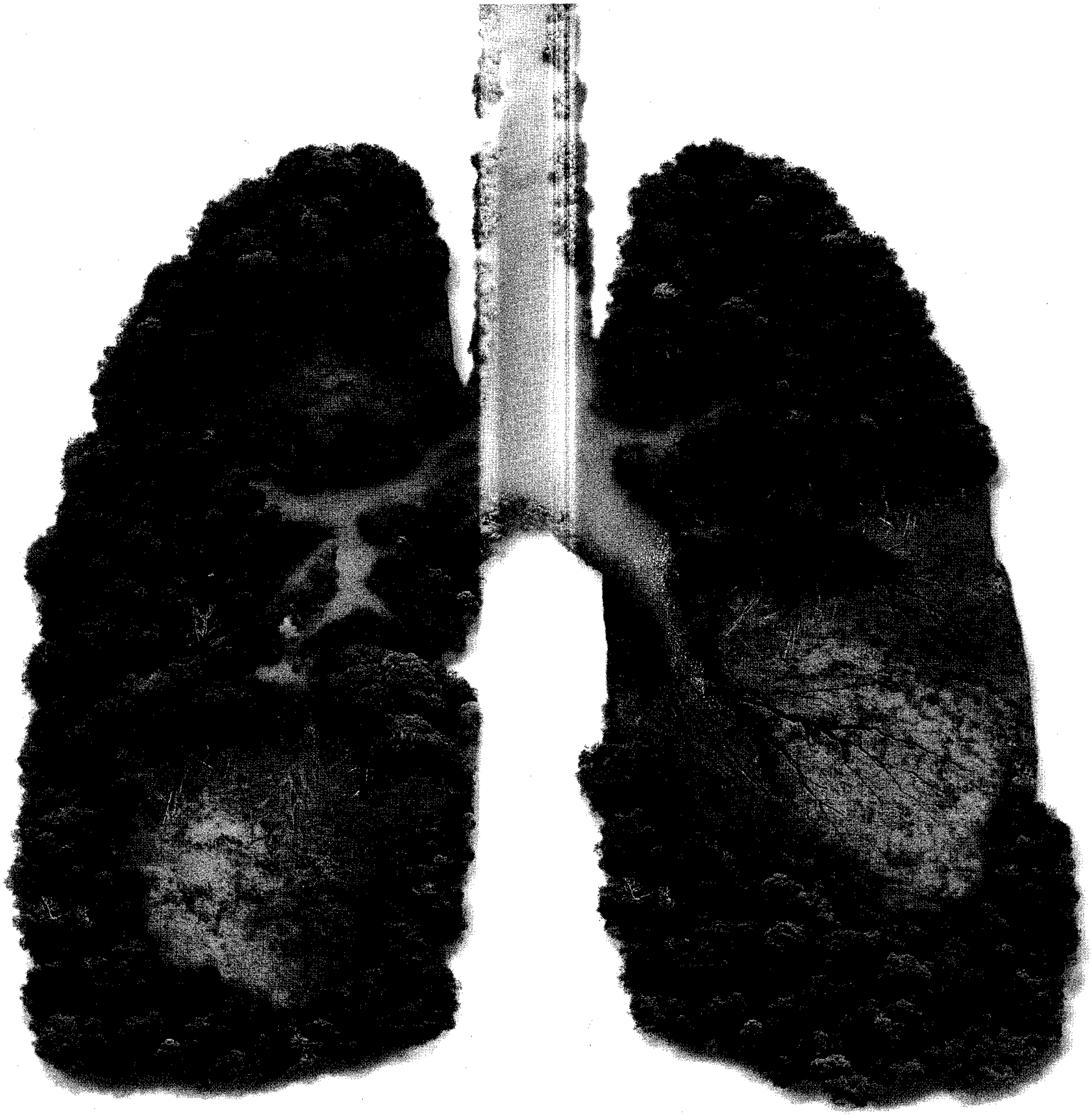

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THE ART WORLD

COME ON DOWN

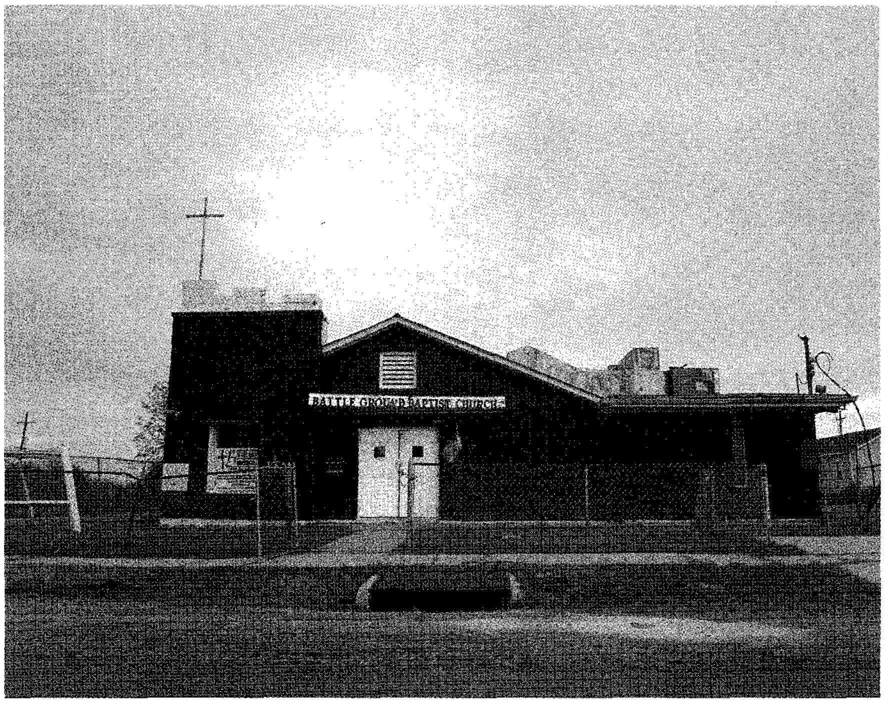
The New Orleans Biennial beckons.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

New Orleans is smaller and poorer than it used to be, as I have confirmed on my first visit there since the floods attendant on Hurricane Katrina obliterated a large part of the city and left much of the rest a mud-gray mess, traces of which aren't hard to find, three years later. I went to review "Prospect.1," the inaugural New Orleans Biennial, which represents eighty-one artists from thirty-four countries in about thirty ad-hoc locations, and which took the whole of a three-day sojourn to explore in full. (A car is essential.) Some of the offerings are keenly rewarding, but the best thing about the show is the sprawl, which affords a wide and deep immersion in the city's complicated charms. Be it ever so small and poor, and despite catastrophic displacements, New Orleans can't help but remain New Orleans, which is to other cities what a poem is to prose. The phantasmagoria of high and vernacular architecture, polyglot flavors, omnipresent music, exuberant cemeteries, and geographical unlikelihood, of a seaport largely below sea level, stokes continual wonderment. Desire isn't only a street name there. A municipal tradition of giddy impulsiveness, shadowed by recent tragedy and chronic woes—including a high incidence of crime—has got to many of the invited artists in "Prospect.1." In the friskily hyperbolic words of a review by Walter Robinson, the editor of *Artnet Magazine*, the show "takes the reprobate scallywag nihilists of the contemporary avant-garde and converts them . . . into goody-two-shoes bleeding-heart believers in the nobility of humankind." You may disdain the frequent sentimentality in the show if you can suppress your own uprushes of sentiment. I could not.

Souped-up biennials and other manifestations of festivalist aesthetics have become routine. "Contextual" practice has proved, after sufficiently abundant experience, to be long on con and short on text. "Prospect.1" is unexceptional on this score, but with a pointed and refreshing candor. Featuring few big names and nary a masterpiece, it is my favorite biennial since the nineteen-eighties, when biennials ceased to be innocently serious roundups of recent art and became heavily engineered spectacles. The show's curator, Dan Cameron, a veteran in the field, put it to me flatly: "I'm a tourism promoter." Contemporary biennials are machines for bringing people to places, funded by parties with vested interests in the migration. In this case, the state of Louisiana contributed what little it could, amounting to about eight per cent of the $3.5-million budget. Corporations chipped in twelve per cent. The rest has come, or is confidently anticipated (Cameron says), from foundations and individuals, bucking the current global tide of financial contraction. The trick is to have a place that speaks, and seduces, for itself, and to select art and artists congenial to it—rather than, in the more common vein, to advertise the host city (São Paulo, Kwangju, Istanbul) as a cookie-cutter capital of new pep and future prominence.

In the vast meadow of shoulder-high grasses and volunteer saplings, curiously gridded with narrow streets, that is most of the Lower Ninth Ward today stands the intensely purplish brick shell of the Battle Ground Baptist Church, since 1964 the home of a congregation displaced from a razed neighborhood in St. Bernard Parish. Inside, there's a big, diamond-shaped, welded-steel basket filled with weight-lifting equipment, surrounded by freestanding walls that function as bulletin boards for community announcements and appeals. Loudspeakers broadcast a strident overlay of snatches of music and, among less identifiable elements, speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr. This installation, "Diamond Gym," is by Nari Ward, a regular participant in international exhibitions. Its jury-rigged, aggressive form and rather forced symbolism—body-building gear for an enfeebled populace—are familiar qualities of art in biennials, where artists, abetted by curators, strain for immediate impact among competing works in cavernous halls. But here the inchoate ambition to engage viewers succeeds. Those tacked-up,



The shell of the Battle Ground Baptist Church, in the Lower Ninth Ward.

FRANK RELLE; COURTESY NARI WARD

mutely urgent signs and flyers, along with the soundtrack's arousing noise, project the once and future vitality of a culture temporarily paralyzed. Ward puts art in service to something that is, declaratively, more important than art. Emerging from the church into the surrounding desolation, you will be moved.

Nearby, in different directions, are two works that are perhaps the most and the least liked by local citizens. Mark Bradford, from Los Angeles, built the highly popular Noah's Ark from salvaged sheets of plywood hoarding partly covered with faded and tattered posters. The rugged, welcoming vessel stands three stories high in a sandy, weedy lot. (Speaking of Los Angeles, the Lower Ninth now boasts scattered, snazzily designed solar-panelled houses, financed by Brad Pitt, that introduce the spice of Southern California chic to the city's architectural gumbo; but their tasteful bland colors might be rethought, the city being New Orleans.) A mile and a half south, the Berliner Katharina Grosse spray-painted the front, sides, and grounds of a derelict house, on a relatively intact block, in reds and yellows that suggest an inferno. The gesture has offended many by seeming to pile an insult of fantasized fire onto the injury of only too real water. As a latecomer to the benumbing, deathly silent horrors of the area's ruin, I liked the work. The Expressionist note of hysteria freed up my feelings, which were unprimed for consoling manifestations like Bradford's ark. Green spears of grass—and shamrocks!—were starting to pierce the yard's crust of paint, stirring hope as wild as the city's despair must have been. But I understand that theatrical acting out by vicariously distraught outsiders is unlikely to beguile Katrina's victims.

Do you think you love Mardi Gras costumes? Until you see them in person, you have no idea. At the New Orleans Museum of Art, in City Park, feathered and beaded suits by Victor Harris, the Big Chief of the Fi-Yi-Yi group of Mardi Gras Indians, stagger comprehension. Their intricate and savage beauty integrates countless insights of aesthetic intelligence, refined over time. "Art" seems too effete a word for such glory. Other "Prospect.1" works with local relevance, at the Contemporary Arts Center, in the warehouse district, are conceptual and political. "The House That Herman Built," by Jackie Sumell, a New York artist transplanted to New Orleans, in collaboration with Herman Wallace, presents models of a dream house conceived by Wallace, a Black Panther who has spent thirty-four years in solitary confinement at the state prison in Angola (his cell is reproduced in wood) for a murder that he and many supporters insist that he didn't commit. A huge installation of refashioned period artifacts, "Remember the Upstairs Lounge," by Skylar Fein, memorializes a bohemian bar where a fire killed thirty-two people in 1973; the event occasioned a Stonewall-like collective coming out of gays in New Orleans. But the show largely endorses the recent decline of identity politics and conceptualism in new art, in favor of poetic and decorative impulses—which converge in the New Orleans-smitten Chicagoan Tony Fitzpatrick's "Chapel of Moths," a suite of dense, lyrical word-and-picture collages (one bears the phrase "Holy Twilight Lilac Water") that graces a lately closed, still telltale-odorous mortuary at the northern fringe of the French quarter.

"Diamond Gym," inside the church, an installation by the New York artist Nari Ward.

Another sinister, stronger smell assaulted me when Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick, photographers married to each other and living in the Ninth Ward, opened the refrigerator in which they keep waterlogged remains of prints and negatives. They said that that dank, complex stench—many sorts of things gone bad, each in its own way—pervaded New Orleans in Katrina's wake. I recalled the chemical acridity that hung on and on in New York's air, long after 9/11. Calhoun and McCormick have rebuilt their fine old cypress-wood house with funds raised by Mark Bradford from an auction of one of his paintings. (Impromptu philanthropy is an art in itself, in today's New Orleans.) They have mounted a show, not officially part of "Prospect.1," of water-damaged prints from a series they had made, "Seeing Our Music," to celebrate the song and dance of neighborhood cohorts, including one toothsomely named the Furious Five Social Aid and Pleasure Club. They selected the pictures, some of them barely legible, for their accidental beauties of liquid swirl and textured soil. Looking at them was like gazing through a scrim into a joyous and lost past. The smiling company of the photographers made it seem good to do. ♦

Headline in the Wall Street Journal.

INVESTORS FLOCK TO NUT FARMS

In their defense, it's been a rough year.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

HARD TIMES

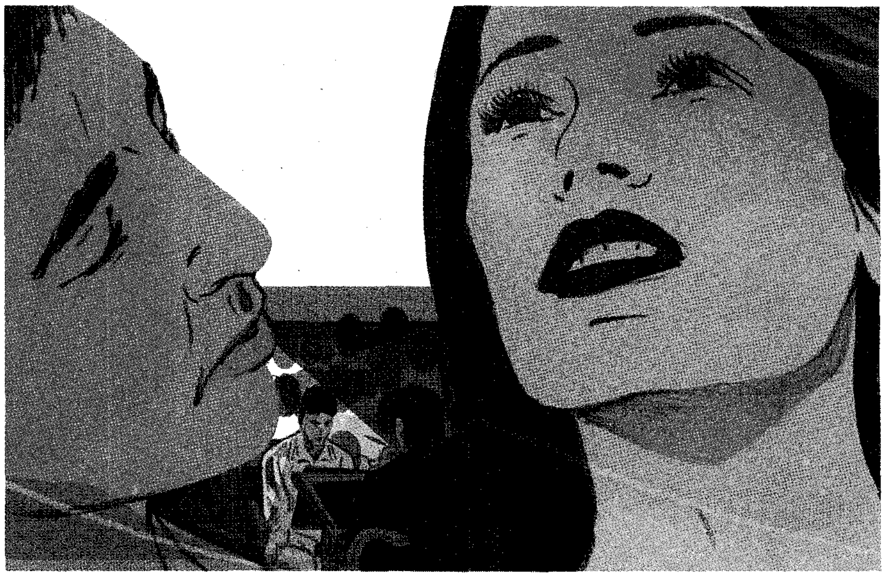
“Slumdog Millionaire” and “A Christmas Tale.”

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Danny Boyle film is called “Slumdog Millionaire,” and a fine title it is, too. As with other mutt-flavored titles, like “Reservoir Dogs,” it sounds like a rabid, crank-it-up rock album that decided to become a movie at the last moment. And here’s the clever part: folded within the title is a plot—a lowering insult, followed by the sweet success of a fight-back. Strictly speaking, there are no surprises in this movie, and most people will be able to predict, within the first ten minutes, roughly how the last ten will pan out. What *is* surprising is the unembarrassed energy that Boyle devotes to his pursuit of the obvious; there’s nothing wrong with the formulaic, it would appear, so long as you bring the formula to the boil.

The setting is Mumbai. Boyle has always been a restive director, starting in Scotland with “Shallow Grave” and “Trainspotting,” before diverting to such noted hot spots as Thailand (“The Beach”) and outer space (“Sunshine”). His style is at once distinctive and impersonal; I like the way his characters lunge at experience, although the films themselves hardly dare to ask how much, or how little, that experience has been worth. The new one begins with an eighteen-year-old named Jamal Malik (Dev Patel) being strung up and interrogated, with electrical help, by the police. This sequence shocks the narrative into life, but there are three problems. One, some of the folk who will like the rest of the movie won’t like this bit at all. Two, it doesn’t square with the ensuing scenes, in which the same cops sit the lad down and chat like friends. And, three, what’s the big deal? Jamal is a Muslim, but he’s not an Islamic terrorist. He’s just on TV.

The script, by Simon Beaufoy (who wrote “The Full Monty”), is based on “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?,” the quiz show that first aired in India, in 2000, and now plays throughout the solar system. As we join Jamal—a *chai-wallah*, or tea-boy, with almost no education—he is one answer away from the top prize of twenty million rupees. The program takes an overnight break, so that viewers can be whipped into a lather and Jamal can be beaten into an admission that he cheated. The only way to prove his innocence is to go through each question and explain to the police precisely how he came to know the answer. And thus the film is set for a series of flashbacks, each serving up a chunk of Indian life. For instance, how does Jamal know the name of a certain movie star? Because, as a kid—smeared head to foot in excrement, having fallen into a public latrine—he fought to get the guy’s autograph. How does he know that Samuel Colt invented the revolver? Because he heard the name when he and his brother used a stolen gun to rescue the beautiful Latika (Freida Pinto)—whom they had befriended as a fellow-orphan—from a lifetime of maltreatment at the hands of an evil pimp.



Dev Patel and Freida Pinto in Danny Boyle’s movie, shot in Mumbai.

RACHEL DOMM

Subtlety, you will have gathered, is not the prime concern here. This is the kind of movie in which, when an adorable child says, “He’s taking care of us, he must be a good man,” you can be quite confident that the man in question will be the local Fagin, or worse. And even the pen of Dickens might have trembled above the page before committing to posterity an exchange like this:

> “Come away with me.”
> “And live on what?”
> “Love.”

There is a mismatch here. Boyle and his team, headed by the director of photography, Anthony Dod Mantle, clearly believe that a city like Mumbai, with its shifting skyline and a population of more than fifteen million, is as ripe for storytelling as Dickens’s London, and they may be right; hence the need to get their lenses dirty on its clogged streets. At the same time, the story they chose is sheer fantasy, not in its glancing details but in its emotional momentum. How else could Boyle get away with assembling his cast for a Bollywood dance number, at a railroad station, over the closing credits? You can either chide the film, at this point, for relinquishing any claim to realism or you can go with the flow—surely the wiser choice. After all, to make an old-fashioned crowd-pleaser is no mean task, requiring both folly and verve; and right now, I suspect, the crowd is ready to be pleased.

The question of what to do after the Christmas feast is one that weighs on most families, more heavily than the food itself. Things are no different for the Vuillard clan, the French family in "A Christmas Tale." First, everybody slumps in front of "The Ten Commandments" on TV, turning glazed eyes upon the mighty beard of Charlton Heston as he conjures the parting of the Red Sea. Later, three people head to midnight Mass: Junon (Catherine Deneuve), who has cancer; her son Henri (Mathieu Amalric), who is unbalanced; and her grandson Paul (Emile Berling), who is suicidal, or at least given to seeing a black dog when he looks in the mirror. All told, a merry crew. And yet, as they walk home, through the sharp and snowy air, they *do* seem happier, like the brief beneficiaries of a miracle.

At two and a half hours, "A Christmas Tale," directed by Arnaud Desplechin, is of a length and an intricacy more proper to the epic, even though it barely strays beyond one extended family. As for the Commandments, Moses himself would have struggled to keep up with the number being broken. The breakage is particularly impressive in the case of Simon (Laurent Capelluto), Junon's nephew, who, it turns out, has been coveting not his neighbor's wife but his cousin's, and finally makes good on that desire; they wake in bed together on Christmas morning, in comfort and joy, despite the fact that her husband and children are in the house. What else would you expect, amid the gnarled branches of the Vuillard family tree? Junon is married to Abel (Jean-Paul Roussillon), a human toad with a big heart. They have three children: Elizabeth (Anne Consigny), Henri, and Ivan (Melvil Poupaud). There were four, but the eldest, Joseph, died at the age of six, of leukemia: the original sin, as it were, from which other miseries have bloomed. Elizabeth, especially, is wrapped in a permanent sadness, which seems to have spread like a blight; her son is the unfortunate Paul, and her husband, a mathematician, is forever on the move, turning up at the family gathering just in time to punch Henri in the face and leave. Is this Elizabeth's fault, or her fate? Do we, in some murky way, deserve—or, at any rate, come to suit—the maladies that we inherit?

Certainly, when Junon learns that her sole hope of a cure is a bone-marrow transplant, it feels horribly fitting that the only compatible donors should be Paul and Henri, both of unsound mind. Still, it is shocking to hear Junon justify her decision with, "I'm taking back what's mine." Is that really what it sounds like: a miser's resentment at having given birth? With her serene and bitter smile, Junon is a monster, calmly confirming, to Henri's face, that she never loved him. Audiences here, their cockles warmed by years of Yuletide viewing, may be repelled by much of this movie, and bewildered by the parts that don't repel. (A health warning: this is a French film, so even the *doctors* smoke.) We like our characters to draw near, in seasonal hope, and resolve their feuds, whereas the Vuillards, though just about hanging in there by the end, seem no closer to knowing one another: "We rub our ears after the fact, and ask ourselves, surprised: what have we experienced?" That is Nietzsche, from the preface to "On the Genealogy of Morals," as recited by Abel to his tearful daughter in her time of trial. As Christmas consolations go, it's a long way from Bing Crosby.

Yet here's the weird thing: Desplechin is no grinch. Though "A Christmas Tale" may be Bing-free, we get to see clips of "Funny Face" and the Max Reinhardt "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Beyond such borrowings, there is a deeper debt to the playfulness of the New Wave, with a lovely opening passage of shadow puppetry, plus snatches of wrong-footing music—wait for the skirl of bagpipes as Henri keels over in the street—and repeated iris effects, with the camera peering at proceedings through a hole in a black screen. As for the characters who decide to address us directly, as if being interviewed, why not? You could treat these tricks as lame attempts to lighten a moody story, but I was moved by the collage that they construct. Watching "A Christmas Tale," with its bursts of old movies, dregs of empty bottles, lines from books, and fragments of half-forgotten conversations, is like getting to know a family other than your own by leafing through its scrapbooks and laughing at its photograph albums, while it bickers in the next room over stuff you may never understand. Death is on the prowl, and yet, as Abel says, "there's nothing tragic about this." Given that Catherine Deneuve is sneaking up behind him to nuzzle his ear, he has a point. ♦

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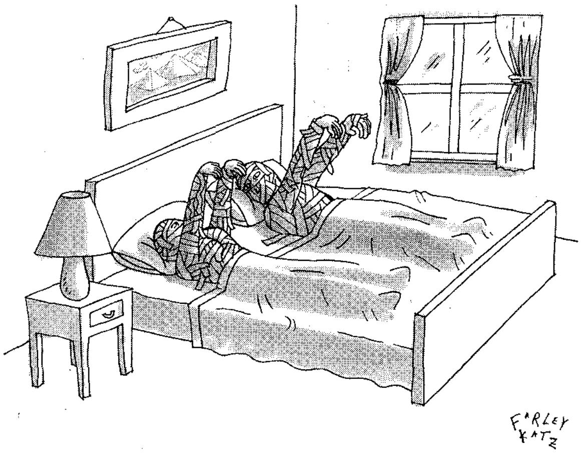
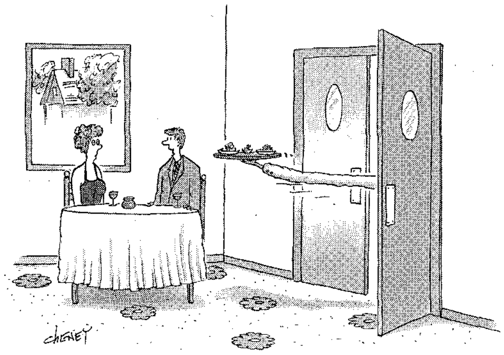
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, November 23rd. Finalists in the November 10th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 8th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"No, no—you're the archeologist this time!"
Eric Reid, Natick, Mass.



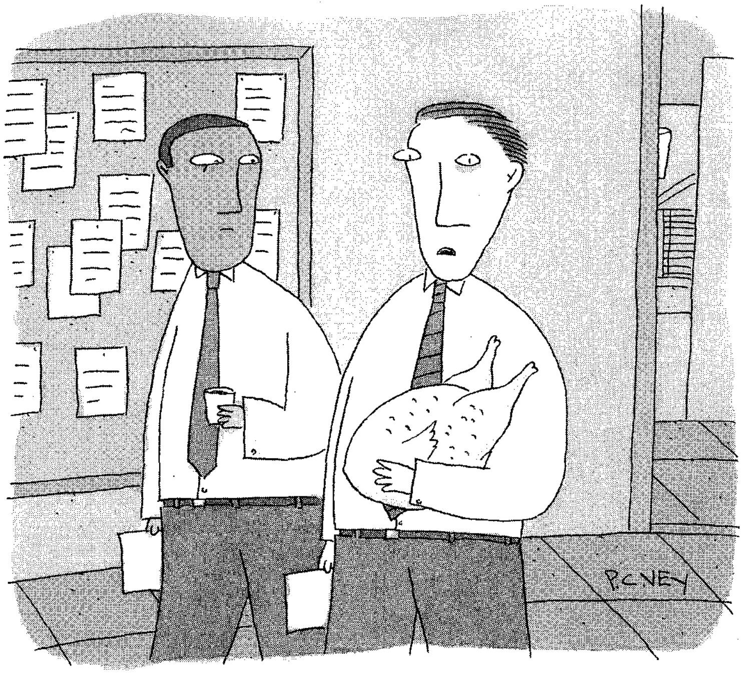
THE FINALISTS

"Apparently, even the Fantastic Four can feel the pinch of the recession."
Marlene Goodman, Wheeling, Ill.

"Please try not to stare at his disproportionately short right arm."
Chas Kikel, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

"The first course has been described as a taste explosion."
Chuck Skeens, Albuquerque, N.M.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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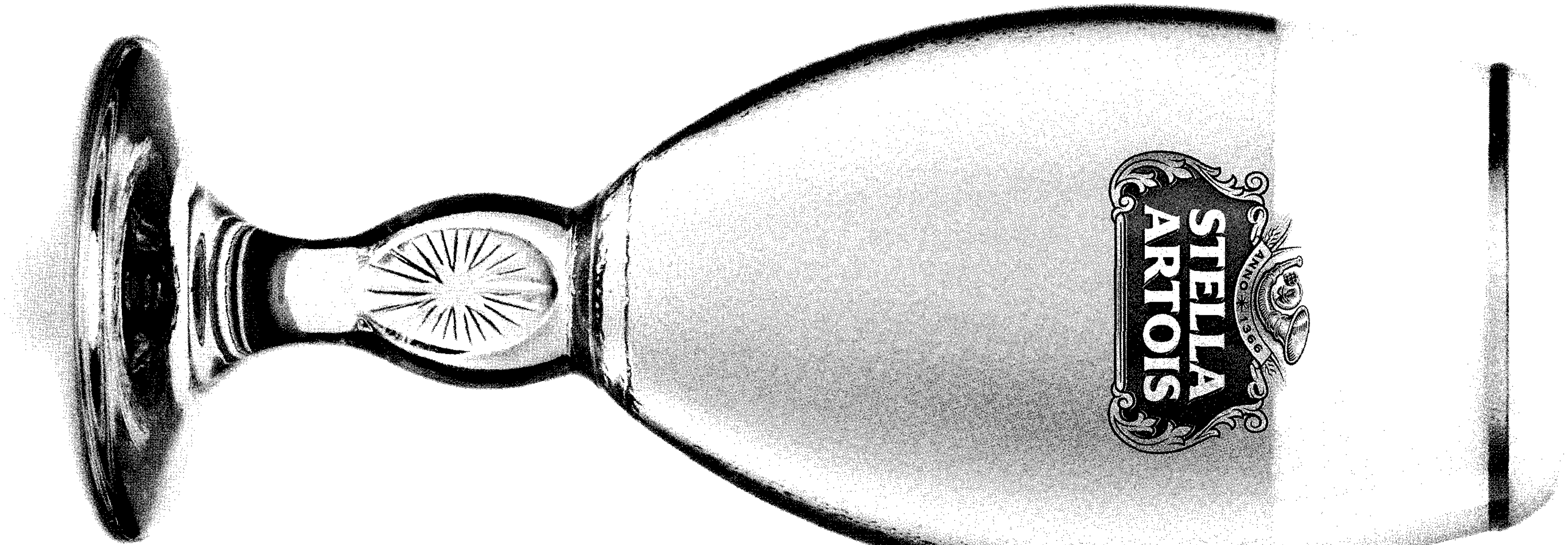

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